"A Story a Story"

# The Black Cat

FOR JUNE

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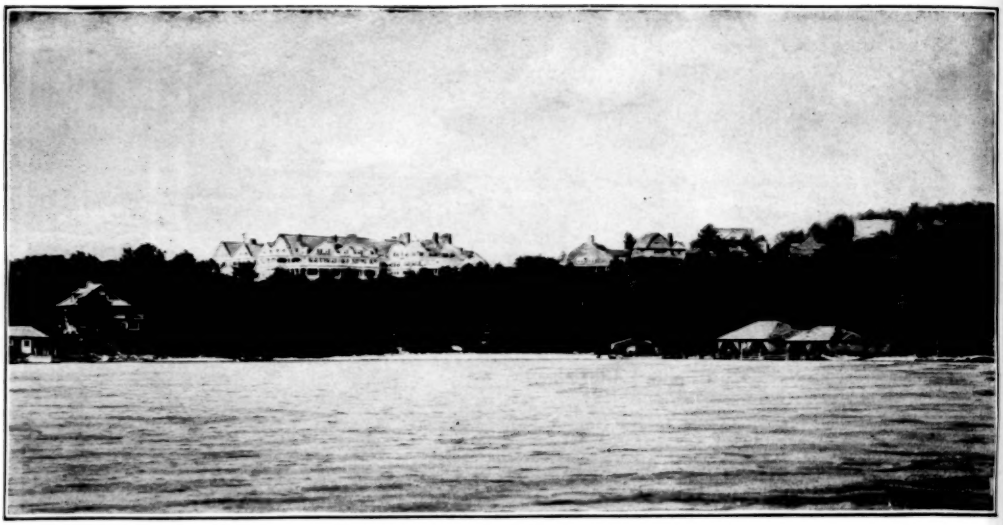
## "A MATTER OF BUSINESS"

**The story of a crooked fight fixed for the third round, but —**

In America



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# The Black Cat

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# A Matter of Business

BY ROSS ELLIS

*This is a story of a crooked fight that was "fixed" for the third round, but there was no third round, because one of the fighters—what's the use; read "The Hammer's" explanation why there was no third round.*

NILS Bergstrom, known to Pacific Coast ring followers as "The Hammer," was pounding the punching bag in Abie Chone's gymnasium. His mild blue eyes were alight, a blissful smile beamed on his rather bovine countenance, and his long arms shot back and forth with the ease of an engine's pistons.

"The Hammer's" fistic career, though short, had been spectacular. Less than a year before, still wearing the clothes in which he had crossed the ocean, he had presented himself at Chone's gymnasium and announced his willingness to do aught that would insure a place to sleep and a reasonable number of meals *per diem*.

It chanced that Blinky Cassidy, the most promising 133-pounder in Chone's string of fighters, was in need of a sparring partner, and the husky little Scandinavian was promptly engaged. He at once demonstrated a serene indifference to any punishment that the redoubtable Blinky could inflict and soon developed an uncanny ability to deliver blows of pulverizing quality with either hand from almost any position.

First securing Bergstrom's signature to a contract that bound the fighter firmly and his manager not at all, the astute Abie Chone cautiously introduced him into the four-round preliminary bouts. Through these, the Norseman went like a whirlwind, losing not a single decision and winning by the knockout route whenever an opponent could be induced to stand up and trade punches. Passing on to the main-event class, he won his first battle with consummate ease and established himself high in the affections of a large percentage of the Coast sporting fraternity.

Now he was matched with "Terrible Terry" Dugan, who had once fought the champion to a ten-round draw. Though Dugan's championship aspirations had been drowned in a shallow cup, he was still a great drawing-card and accounted one of the toughest customers in the 133-pound division. Many of the newspaper experts had expressed their conviction that "The Hammer's" triumphal advance was due to be rudely checked,

and Abie Chone was much inclined to doubt his wisdom in making the match. The little Norseman, however, was as free from doubts and fears as a game chicken.

Observing that his manager had entered the room, Nils cut loose with a mighty blow that tore the bag from its moorings and hurled it against the opposite wall.

"So shall Ay do to dees Dugan faller tomorrow night," he promised with a toothful grin. "Ay shall bust him vide open."

"It gets you nothing to bust up the furniture," observed Abie Chone reprovingly. "Come here. I've got a story to tell you."

He led the way into the back room, furnished with a battered roll-top desk and a few chairs, which did duty as an office. Bergstrom leaped from the platform and padded after his manager with the unhesitating obedience of a well-trained dog.

"Vall, Meester Chone?" he questioned, standing respectfully beside the desk before which the other had seated himself.

"Nils," said the little man with the shrewd black eyes and the shoe-brush moustache, "I've just been talking to Dave Triner, Dugan's manager."

"Yaas, Meester Chone."

"We've fixed up a little business deal for tomorrow night. You don't lick Dugan. He licks you."

He whom an enthusiastic reporter had referred to as "The Hammer of Thor," stared at his manager in wounded surprise.

"He ent able," he protested. "Maybe he bane a purty tough faller, but Ay tenk—"

"Thinking ain't good enough," interrupted Chone, leaning forward and shaking a stubby forefinger under the other's nose. "I want to *know*, and so does Triner. If Dugan was an odds-on favorite in the betting, like he ought to be, we'd fix it the other way. But he ain't. You've won many a fight here, Nils, and the local boys have turned loose a flood of money. I want some of that dough, and I'm looking to you to bring it home. Get me?"

Nils Bergstrom nodded sagely. "You vant Ay shall carry home for you the money you vin when Ay lick dees Dugan," he said placidly. "Ay shall bring a satchel."

Abie threw up his hands in a gesture of despair.

"Deliver me from explaining anything to a Swede!" he complained to the office cat. "I tell you, Nils, you *don't* lick Dugan. You don't *try* to lick him. The deal is all fixed up. Now listen:

"For the first two rounds, you tear into him like you was going to eat him alive—just like you always fight, and like the fans will expect you to. In the third, he'll stall as if he was tired and stagger up against the ropes. When you hear me yell, 'Get him, Nils,' you are to jump at him wide open—and Dugan will do the rest. There's an extra hundred in it for you. *Now* do you get me?"

"The Hammer's" round blue eyes were reproachful. "You—you vant Ay shall *let* him lick me?" he questioned, unbelievingly.

"That's the idea. You follow me, Nils, and you'll be a rich man one of these days. Dugan will give us an-

other fight later, and you can flatten him then if you've got the goods. But this time you lose in the third round. Understand?"

There was much grief, but no thought of rebellion in the fighter's simple mind.

"Ay understand," he said heavily,—"in the third round."

It was a sore-hearted pugilist who, half an hour later, left the gymnasium and strode moodily down the street. The moral considerations involved in a "fixed" fight troubled him little; but to one who has begun to cherish vague dreams of a lightweight championship, the prospect of an undeserved "K. O." on his record is not a pleasant one.

In this crisis, "The Hammer's" fancy lightly turned to thoughts of food. Blessed by Nature with a body whose normal weight was pounds below the lightweight limit, he was accustomed to eat what and when he pleased, which was much and often. A square meal brought to Nils the same surcease of sorrow that Mr. Poe sought vainly in his books.

Into McCann's restaurant he turned with a vicious swing that jarred to buzzing activity the swarm of flies that clung to the screen door. He took his accustomed place at one of the tables presided over by pretty Nellie Parsons, for whom he had long nursed a hopeless passion that expressed itself in sidelong glances and stammering comments on the weather.

At sight of him, that popular young person's naturally high color took on an even brighter tint, and she surreptitiously studied her reflection in the long mirror which lined the wall. Reassured as to the arrangement of her coiffure and the impeccability of her neat uniform, she placed before Nils a clean menu-card and bent over him with a hint of more than professional solicitude.

"How's tricks, Mr. Bergstrom?" she questioned pertly. "You look sorta down in the mouth."

"The Hammer's" gloomy expression disappeared in a wide and tender smile. Tomorrow's troubles were forgotten in the joys of today. Never before had his divinity seemed so approachable.

"Mees Nellie," he said with laborious gallantry, "*you* are the purtiest leetle trick in *dees* town."

"Listen to the man!" laughed Nellie. "Why, Mister Bergstrom, I actually believe you're trying to flirt with me. You men are all alike. You lead us poor girls on and then make fools of us."

"Ay ent fooling," said Nils seriously. "Ay bane loving you dees long time—ever since first Ay seen you. Ay ent no trifler, Mees Nellie."

"My, you are a speedy man when you get started!" ejaculated the pretty little waitress. Then her black eyes grew languorous.

"Do you really mean all that—Nils?" she asked softly. "This is about the first time you ever spoke to me straight out, you know."

"Mees Nellie," said Nils earnestly, "Ay ent dared. Ay bane loving you, but Ay ent dared tell you. But Ay am wanting to marry you, Mees Nellie. Ay make money fast, now. Some day Ay will be champion. So soon as Ay lick dees faller, Dugan, Ay shall—"

A wave of shameful memory swept over "The Hammer's" brain, and he stopped short, his fair skin brick-red.

Nellie Parsons leaned forward, her eyes alight with enthusiasm.

"I believe you, Nils," she breathed in his ear, "and if you want to know how strong you are with me, just listen to this. Yesterday I drew out every cent I had in the savings-bank—three hundred perfectly good dollars, all I've saved in four years of hard work—and Dad took it down to the pool-room last night and bet it all on you at even money. So when you go up against Dugan tomorrow night, you can feel that you are fighting for me, too."

Nils Bergstrom's flushed face turned a ghastly gray. He stared at the girl in wild-eyed horror.

"You—bet—your—money—on—me?" he gasped.

"Sure I did. Why, Nils, you'll lick that old 'has-been' easy. You ought to get him by the third round."

"The third round!" he echoed bitterly.

"Of course," she said with calm confidence. "And now give me your order, 'cause the boss is watching us pretty hard. What are you going to have?"

"The Hammer" pushed back his chair and got unsteadily to his feet.

"Excuse, Mees Nellie," he faltered brokenly. "Ay guess—Ay guess Ay ent hungry." And before she could recover from her surprise, he had seized his hat and hurried out of the restaurant.

He sped straight back to the gymnasium, whence, by a lucky chance, Abie Chone had not yet departed. Nils burst into his manager's office like a Scandinavian whirlwind.

"Meester Chone," he shrilled excitedly, "it ent right. Fallers in dees town bet on me, and Ay ought to fight yust so gude as Ay can. They lose their money if Dugan licks me. It ent right, Ay tell you!"

"Now listen to me, Nils," said Abie Chone with infinite calm, "and I'll tell *you* something you can paste in your hat and remember as long as you live. In the fighting game, like everything else, you've got to be a business man. The right thing to do is the thing that gets you the most money—always, all the time. These guys ain't betting on you because they love you. They've got a fool notion that because you haven't been licked yet, you ain't never going to be. That's all. They're following their 'material interest,' as the I. W. W. orators say. Well, it's to *my* material interest for you to be licked this time. And licked you're certainly going to be."

Nils sighed.

"How mooch money do I get for being licked?" he asked submissively.

"You get two hundred—win, lose or draw; and a hundred more out of what I clean up in the betting. That's three hundred iron men for sparring seven minutes and taking a punch in the jaw in the third round. Pretty soft money, if you ask *me*."

"Vall, just as you say, Meester Chone," agreed Nils humbly. Yet a close observer might have identified the glint in his round blue eyes as the light of a dawning idea.

The same mythical observer, had he followed the pugilist to his modest sleeping quarters on the floor above

the gymnasium, would have seen him bring forth from an ancient steamer trunk a writing tablet and a stubby pencil and proceed to wrinkle his smooth brow over a mighty problem in mathematics.

At ten o'clock of the following night, Nils Bergstrom crawled through the ropes in Micklebaum's Pavilion, grinning at the crowd like a Norse cherub. Almost immediately, on the other side of the ring, appeared the formidable figure of Dugan, closely followed by his manager who, even in the terrible one's decline, still found him an invaluable meal-ticket.

The announcer led Nils about the ring.

"Nils Bergstrom," he yelled, "the battling Swede, better known as 'The Hammer.' The undefeated pride of Chone's athletic club. The boy who wins his fights in a punch."

The crowd shouted its approval, and "The Hammer's" grin widened.

Dugan was led forward.

"This handsome young man," continued the man with the bull-like voice, "is Terrence O'Brien Dugan; known to all the world as 'Terrible Terry.' Winner of fifty fierce fights and as game as they make 'em. He will now attempt to hammer 'The Hammer.'"

"It's perfectly safe," jeered Dugan. "The ads. all say so."

"Look out for de explosion," came a voice from the dollar seats.

Nils smiled on as one who dreams pleasant dreams. He was still smiling when the bell rang. It was with that same blissful expression that he drove his right glove into Dugan's mid-section with such spirit as to cause that doughty person to emit a pained grunt and hang on desperately. Nils tore himself free with ripping body blows, measured his distance, and cut loose a mighty swing for the jaw—which missed by a fraction of an inch. "Terrible Terry" met him with a whirlwind return, and the round ended with the two slugging merrily away in the middle of the ring, and the crowd on its feet yelling like madmen.

"Fine, Nils, fine!" whispered Abie Chone, as he leaned over "The Hammer's" chair and proffered the water bottle. "You're a regular John Drew. I didn't think you had it in you. Just keep that up for one more round, and then—"

"Ay keep him oop," grunted Nils, dabbing delicately at an eye on which Dugan's glove had landed.

In the other corner, Terrence Dugan favored Dave Triner with a reproachful glare. "What's this Swede tryin' to do?" he demanded earnestly, though furtively. "I thought you had him fixed to drop to me."

"So he is—in the third round," breathed the guardian of his fortunes.

"That's a long way off," said Dugan. "He dam near broke me in two with that right of his. I'll murder him for that."

"Aw, he's just making it look good," whispered Triner.

"It don't look good to me, nor feel good neither," complained Dugan bitterly. "I'm going to slow him up a bit. He gets his, this round."

At the tap of the bell, Dugan was half-way across the ring before the more phlegmatic Norseman had left his chair. They met almost in "The

Hammer's" corner, with a mighty crash of thudding gloves and heaving bodies. "Terrible Terry" was giving Nils the full benefit of the annihilating attack which had carried him far on the road toward the lightweight crown, and which probably would have sufficed for the whole journey, had it been backed by rigorous training and the stamina which is the reward of good clean living.

Blocking what he could and philosophically absorbing the remainder, Nils lived through a cyclonic minute. Then it became apparent to all that the Swede had weathered the storm and was in turn the aggressor.

Half a minute later, Terry reeled back from a terrific smash over the heart and dived desperately into a clinch, his knees bending under him, his body sagging weakly, while "The Hammer" continued to belabor him with overhand wallops to the kidneys.

"Eat him up, Bergstrom!" yelled his backers in the crowd.

"Careful, you fool!" yelled Abie Chone hoarsely, forgetting caution in his desperation.

"Stay away from him, Terry!" implored Triner. "Box him clever!"

Terrence Dugan made a noble effort to obey the voice of authority. He slipped from the clinch to the accompaniment of a swarm of rights and lefts, and backed away on unsteady legs, his gloves waving before his face, his elbows drawn in to protect his battered body.

The Norseman was after him like a flash.

"Stop it, Nils! Stop it!" wailed Abie Chone, dancing up and down in a vain effort to attract his protégé's attention.

It would have been as easy to stop a famished porker on his way to a particularly well-filled trough. Out darted "The Hammer's" left glove in a disconcerting feint, and up from the neighborhood of the floor came his right, in an uppercut that tore through Dugan's ineffectual guard and landed flush on the point of his jaw.

Then the referee began to count. He stopped at "ten," but he might have continued up to ten thousand without in the least disturbing Mr. Dugan.

With such grace as he could muster, Abie Chone accepted the congratulations of the reporters and friends who crowded into the dressing room. To the blissfully smiling Nils Bergstrom, he said nothing until he had him locked in the office of the gymnasium in company with the grim-faced Dave Triner.

"Now, you dirty, ungrateful pup," he roared, "what's the idea? Who's been paying you to double-cross me?"

"Don't overdo it, Chone," sneered Triner. "You might as well can the Faversham stuff. You're in on this thing, too."

"In it?" shrieked Abie, thrusting a bunch of pink slips into the doubter's hands. "Look at my tickets. I got two thousand bet on Dugan to lick this boob—and then you say I'm in on the double-cross! In? I'm all in—that's what I am. Bergstrom, what you got to say for yourself?"

"Ay ent double-cross nobody," said Nils in a surprised tone, turning his

one undamaged optic first on his irate manager and then on the apoplectic Triner.

"Didn't—"choked Triner. "Didn't you understand that the fight was fixed for Dugan—that you was to lay down to him in the third round?"

"But, Meester Triner," protested Nils innocently, "there *ent* no third round."

"Aw, the Swede's a fool!" snorted Triner in disgust. "Let him go, Chone. He don't know any better."

"Yes, just a plain fool," agreed Abie sorrowfully, as he unlocked the door. "He does all his thinking with his hands. Go on up to bed, Nils. You simply ain't got sense enough to be a business man."

But their opinion of "The Hammer's" acumen might have been altered, had they seen the sheet of paper at which he glanced complacently before seeking his well-earned rest. It bore the result of his calculations of the night before; it read thus:

FOR WINING

| | |
|---|---|
| Mi bit | $200.00 |
| Mis Nelys mony | 300.00 |
| Wat she win on bet | 300.00 |
| | $800.00 |

FOR LOOSING

| | |
|---|---|
| Mi bit | $200.00 |
| Wat Mr. Chone pay me | 100.00 |
| | $300.00 |

Wining better as loosing $500.00

"Ay tenk," murmured Nils dreamily, "Ay tenk—Ay—bane—purty—*gude*—beesiness man!"

# Attar of Roses

BY THOMAS FAY WALSH

*Facing death, a man plans the last final penalty for an uncle who had wronged him.*

LIKE the roof of Hades, the Plaza radiated heat long after the sun had set. If it were any cooler than the hotel, it was imperceptible; but, at least, there were fellow heat-sufferers, and man can suffer more patiently in company. Chairs scraped, glasses clinked, voices rose and fell. I wandered from café to café, seeking a table or a vacant seat. The outside tables were crowded; to go inside was unthinkable and useless, as every chair was doing duty. Finally, I reached the last, and, because it was near the water's edge and a faint zephyr stirred the air, the crowd seemed thickest.

"If the Senor will but wait a minute, a chair will soon be vacant," assured the proprietor.

But as that was the fourth time I had heard that in twenty minutes, I turned away disgusted, and bumped into a white-clad figure, carrying a portable table and a camp-stool. Though our impact was slight, he dropped his burden and would have fallen but for my grasp on his arm. It was like grasping the arm of a skeleton, so thin and bone-like did it feel. His face was ghastly white; but his eyes, buried in heavy shadows, were feverishly bright. He was gasping like a winded runner. In fact, I thought he was going to collapse, but in a few minutes, he recovered somewhat. We set up his little table and seated him.

"I'm all in," he said; "slightest shock, no wind." He motioned to the waiter, who had hurried up. "Bring my friend a chair, box, anything to sit on."

He would not listen to my profuse apologies, but begged me to stay.

"Awful lonesome," he pleaded. "Join me," and with a pallid smile, he finished: "never refuse the dead."

So I stayed. He was a bottomless reservoir for drink. He mixed the drinks recklessly; and, the more he drank, the less he coughed, the better he talked. He was American all over, and evidently a thoroughbred. He knew some polo men I knew, and that, with our libations to Bacchus, cemented our friendship; so we talked of sport, of hunting, the surprising turn the great polo match had taken, of Broadway, women, and immortality. We tore the universe to shreds and rebuilt it to our liking; and, truly, if we could remember how we reconstructed it, it must have been a noble edifice, indeed.

Finally, we fell silent, gazing out into the sea—by that time, I had captured a chair to replace my box, as, verily, I needed its back to lean

against—with its unfathomable darkness and the wondrous star-spread dome overhead, and he talked of space and vast distances, and that old puzzling question man has racked his feeble brain about, "What lies beyond?"

"Only a little while," he said. "I know all, and I'm not afraid, although sometimes, when I lay sleepless listening to a baby crying, I wish I were that child, or that gay young fellow I saw kissing his girl in the park, and, sometimes, I even think I could endure life-imprisonment if I could only live. But it can not be, and I must not murmur; for ever I love gameness, above all things, whether in man or horse or dog, and when my little balance at life's bank is gone and the collector approaches, I must meet him with a smile."

So we drank some more, and as we shook hands for the twentieth time, I felt so sorry for him I wept.

Finding that he roomed at my hotel, I endeavored to lug him home, but we must have zig-zagged pretty erratically, for we found ourselves, finally, at the back door, where a chef kindly steered us to the higher regions. I saw his man get him to bed, and, of course, we had to have a last drink.

Like the straw on the camel's back, that drink broke down the last barrier between us. It loosened his tongue like a broken flood-gate, and he told me the most amazingly absurd, yet blood-stirring tale of persecution, of a vague, subtle life-destroying creature who had wrecked his life and health, and left him as he was. He waxed eloquent on the fitting vengeance he had planned, which was the lodestone that had brought him to this enervating climate, and he said he dared not risk going home for fear he would not survive the journey, his revenge unfulfilled. He told how he had so cunningly schemed that this direful monster was coming to him, and how he would need a faithful friend; and I swore to stand by him and help, anyhow.

I was in no condition to remember the ravings of a disordered brain, so, finally, I dragged myself off, to fall into bed, clothes and all, as, by that time, to undress myself was an impossible feat, and I had no man.

We became great friends. He was witty, fond of books, and a veritable encyclopedia on sport. Although we talked of many things, he never referred to that nightmarish story again. We never got quite so drunk again; perhaps that may account for it.

He was visibly failing in that burning clime. I never could quite understand why he was there. He seemed to have plenty of money and spent freely; but he had one peculiarity I heartily disliked, and that was the indiscriminate use of perfume. His rooms and person reeked of attar of roses. I spoke to him jokingly about it once, and he replied shortly, his voice as sharp as a chisel, that he disliked it as much as I did, but his tone forbade further questioning.

He brightened visibly when he received news that his uncle, in response to his urgent message, was coming to see him, and, from the manner in which he awaited his arrival, I guessed the bond between them to be a very strong one. It was, but not

in the manner I thought. His uncle was his sole heir, he told me once, and that he had no control over the disposition of the estate left in trust to him; but as the days passed and steamer after steamer came in, he grew more impatient. He would pace his rooms or the veranda like a wild animal, until weakness compelled him to sit down, or he brought on a choking fit of coughing. But, one day, a wireless message came, and, as I was going to his rooms, I took it from the boy. It was from his uncle, and the boat was due that afternoon.

I rapped on the door, which was slightly ajar. There was no answer, so I walked in. He was standing near the window, his back turned. The air was permeated with the most powerful odor of roses I ever experienced. He was working eagerly over a large glass case, and he held a small glass vial, from which he was dropping some liquid carefully. So absorbed in his task was he that I was at his elbow before he sensed my presence. With wonderful rapidity for an invalid, he turned and struck at me, missed—his momentum carrying him to the floor.

"George!" I cried.

Never had I seen such a rage distorted face as he turned toward me. His eyes literally blazed, a hectic flush suffused his face. As he recognized me, his features relaxed, the intensity of the eyes dulled, and he smiled wanly. I got him into a chair and mixed him a stiff drink.

"My God," he whispered hoarsely, "how you startled me! Why didn't you speak?"

"I made noise enough coming in," I answered and gave him the wireless.

It acted on him like the elixir of life. He was like a new man and I wondered at the affection he must have for his uncle. Then I glanced toward the glass box, and what I saw brought me to my feet, exclaiming. Inside its thick walls was a monstrous malignant spider, larger than a tarantula, more like an octopus. It was venomously attacking meat, and from the vial beside the case, lying where he had dropped it so suddenly, I judged he had been pouring rose perfume on the food. It was certainly a hideous-looking animal. Its cage was heavily wired on top, and when George, noticing my astonishment, but vouchsafing no explanation, carried it to a closet, I noticed he wore heavy gauntlets. He begged me to forget his sudden outbreak and made me promise not to mention about his strange pet to anyone.

"It's a kind of hobby," he said, "and if they knew I had it here, they might make me destroy it, although it is not dangerous."

I very much doubted his last statement, but was glad to go. The awful perfume was nauseating.

"There is something very wrong somewhere; of that, I am sure," I thought.

The uncle arrived. I was not at the boat, but their meeting must have been pathetic. In spite of his weak condition, George insisted on going. His man went with him. George was a veritable bundle of nerves, just living by force of will. I met them at dinner that evening. Warner was a big, ordinary-looking man, nothing striking except his lips. They were

fearfully thin; when shut, his mouth looked like a knife-edge. George ate little; he seemed content to hear his uncle talk and feast his eyes on him. I could not make out Warner's attitude toward his nephew. He did not drink; he seemed wary, always watching. Now and then, he looked at George in a peculiar manner. I supposed he was searching for the motive that brought him to such an infernal place in the height of summer and the importunate cablegram that had dragged him from the cool breezes of the North. Still, he was very affable and jolly and solicitous about his nephew.

It was the first night in weeks that George went to bed really sober. We sat with him a while, and he seemed actually happy.

Warner's rooms were on the other side of the hotel, facing the water. After we bade George good-night, I walked part way with him, and he indulged in some fancy expletives about the heat and food, and his tiresome journey, and the whims of invalids in general, and of that awful perfume.

"By Heavens, how it sickens me!" he said.

I didn't blame him. A little would be tolerable, but it was overwhelming, the way George used it. I would have given anything to know his real feelings toward the boy. He was a lawyer by profession and would be a very rich man when his nephew died, judging from what George had told me. Well, I was leaving that detestable place the next week, yet I hated to think of leaving that poor boy so gamely smiling in the dread reaper's face. Still his uncle was there and I felt he would be content.

The next day, they were together all day. I did not see much of them until night. Then a curious thing happened. They were standing in the lobby, and, whatever he said, George laughed loudly. Warner seemed afraid to touch George or get close to him. Then, he took him by the arm; they were evidently going to bed. At least, George was; it was after eleven.

At times, when he laughed, it caused coughing, and he had a violent coughing spell. I hastened forward and we helped him to a chair; Warner bent over him anxiously. George took a medicine-vial from his pocket and emptied it into his mouth. Scarcely had he done so when a paroxysm of coughing attacked him, and right into his uncle's face, he blew the contents of the vial. It must have been that heavy rose oil, from the smell.

Warner sprang back, his face livid, murderously deformed. For an instant, I thought he would bury his massive fist in his nephew's body, but he recovered himself, and by the time George was through coughing, he was the same quiet, solicitous friend. But in that instant I had seen the real man and it was not a very pleasant thing to see.

George was heartbroken about it, but Warner, vigorously mopping his face, assured him it was nothing. I offered to take George to his rooms, so his uncle could change his clothes and bathe. He certainly was odoriferous, and from what I know of perfumes, he was liable to be so for some days to come.

I got the poor boy to bed. He was

very weak. I didn't think he would ever leave it again and, somehow, my mind was full of that chaotic story he had told me at our first meeting. Could his uncle have been the friend in it? He looked capable of anything in that revealing second when the cloak of friendship fell. If so, he didn't need to worry about poor George's harming him.

I met Jamison, the valet, carrying a tray as I left the dining room the next day. George, he said, was very bad. The doctor was then with him. It seemed that, some time during the night, he got up, either delirious or asleep, and wandered about the hotel corridors until he was in a state of complete exhaustion. The night clerk had found him lying in a huddled heap and had him carried to his apartments.

"I'll be glad to get home, sir," Jamison complained. "What with heat and perfume, and that awful pet spider, I'm nearly crazy; but he loves the thing, sir. That's what he came down to this ungodly hole for. Bought it from a native way up the country before we came here, and he saw dozens of them before he took this one. He perfumes everything it eats. No matter where he hides the food, as long as he puts rose on it, the creature finds it. He has it running up the doors and eating on the transom-sill, from one room into another, on the closet-shelves, and lately, sir, he's been feeding it on the bed. He says it is not poisonous, but he always handles it with gloves. I don't see how he stands that vile cologne, sir. It costs him a heap of money, too. I'm most sick of it all, and that spider will bite me yet. I'll call you, sir, if he gets worse," and he hurried away.

I certainly agreed with poor Jamison on his views on perfume and spiders. A few minutes later, he called me. George was seated, dressed in his usual white, but there was a big change. Death was in his eyes. He coughed incessantly. He wanted to go to his uncle. I offered to send a boy or go myself, but he would not hear of it. He was in a highly nervous condition and our refusal only accentuated it. So, Jamison and I on each side, we started.

I wondered if Warner still smelled of perfume, and what he would say to our humoring the sick boy's every notion. As it was almost nine o'clock, he would be up and dressed. We knocked and called repeatedly, but there was no answer; so I sent Jamison to the dining-room, lobby, and office, but without result. No one had seen him that morning.

Finally, the manager came, and his pass-key opened the door. Warner lay on the floor, a little way from the bed, and there we stood transfixed —the manager, poor George, the valet, and I—and gazed down on that distorted face, swollen almost beyond recognition. It looked like apoplexy, combined with acute erysipelas. Some of the bed-clothes were trailed around him; his hand convulsively grasped a pillow. He must have died in awful agony, trying, perhaps, to reach the door. The thin lips were drawn back in a snarl, gruesome to behold.

As we stood there, suddenly George collapsed, sinking to his knees, but his eyes never left the horrible face. Lord, what a sight for a dying man

to see! We stretched him out gently, almost beside his uncle, and Jamison hurried for the doctor.

The doorway was crowded with terrified guests and servants. George gasped faintly. His fingers plucked nervously at his coat; his eyes seemed filled with a triumphant look of victory. He whispered something so low I did not catch it, and the light broke in his eyes. There they lay, uncle and nephew, side by side; one stricken in the prime of health, the other a wasted shell.

Involuntarily, my eyes turned back to the strong man, who had died so hard. The little veins in his cheek were swollen and distended; they looked like a spider's web. As that thought struck me, I knew in a flash what George had whispered and I sickened to the very soul.

Trembling like a palsied man, I staggered to my feet, one burning thought consuming me. Forcing my way through the crowded doorway, I hurried to George's room, which we had left only a few minutes before, yet it seemed like hours. I rushed to the closet, tore open the door, and looked. The tarantula's cage was empty.

# Twenty-five Dollars To Go

BY LEO NOBLE BURNETT

*A gambler, up against it, decides on suicide. But the disregard for money that lead him to the act, in the crisis, saved him.*

N addition to being broke, Williams was intoxicated,—not an unfamiliar condition. For ten years he had been gambling the family honor and the family fortune. He was entirely rid of the honor and that he was broke would imply that he had squandered the fortune. In a strict sense, however, he could hardly be called broke. There was still $100, a sacred little sum for the emergency of a funeral. In the ups and downs of a gambling career, he had been discrete enough to snatch aside enough for his last rites, and it had never occurred to him that the money was available for any other purpose than the emergency.

He arose from the table stiffly—limb by limb. A shaky pause to gain his balance, a stagger, a shamble, and he was out of the rear door into the alley. The men were too busy nodding over their cards to notice, except one—a puffy, red fellow, who came tottering doorward. "I say, Jim, don't go just yet," he said limply, but Williams was leering down the alley. Then the door came shut, cutting off the warm odor of smoky beer fumes. In flaccid relaxation, he leaned against the side of the building.

The light from a timid Fifteenth Street lamp penetrated into the alley and partly showed his face—pale, thin, nervous and sensitive. He appeared to be a man of refined vulgarity, well dressed and probably thirty. An excellent profile, in fact, a little black mustache would have made him handsome. He took something from his overcoat pocket—a small revolver. He regarded it with his head tilted to one side, gave a hopeless little laugh, and put it back into his pocket.

"Better wait till I get to the house," he said.

If the nearby clock had not struck four or some other hour, he would have fallen asleep to awake in a police station, but it was conveniently four o'clock before the alcoholic doze had entirely conquered him, and he took a sudden brace. He turned up his coat collar, set his derby aright and put on his gloves, rocking unsteadily.

When intoxicated, Williams always tried to be a gentleman. In fact, he carried his gentlemanliness to the extent of profuse politeness. He passed out of the alley and up the street. Upon meeting occasional four o'clock wanderers, he removed his hat and bowed deeply, nearly upsetting himself. Frequently he laughed and seemed not at all like

a man who contemplated suicide. Williams had determined, however, that when the city awoke its population should be decreased by one. Why not make a final settlement with himself when he could pay his funeral expenses? The money was the excuse and the revolver was a sort of incentive. Without either, suicide for Williams would have been quite impossible.

He continued several blocks, upholding his body and his drunken dignity. A weazened little new lad, strangely alone on the street, pushed a paper before his face. Williams laughed, and taking a childish delight in confiding his condition to someone, even to a newsboy, he pulled out his wallet and opened it. To his surprise, a lonesome dime fell out and rolled toward the gutter. He pointed to it; the boy gave over the extra and scrambled after the money. Williams forgot the money and the boy, clutched the paper and continued, his footsteps echoing loudly in the big empty street.

Turning a corner, he emerged from the fashionable thoroughfare into one of those poor little districts which often exist like little rotten spots, in the very heart of a city. It was the street by the river, crowded for the most part by wholesale houses and nondescript places of business. Dismal window displays thrust up before him the waxen figures of women, uncanny spirits in dresses and hats of reduced prices. On the corner he recognized the tombstone shop which he had passed so frequently on his way to and from his room. Its grim significance stirred him, and he recalled, with a giddy little laugh, the girl whom he had seen in there among the tombstones. The incongruity of the thing tickled him.

Two blocks more, and he halted before a pathetic stone building of dilapidated grandeur. He passed up two flights of stairs, stumbled along an extremely narrow hall and pushed open a door. Switching on a light, he tossed his paper on the table. Then he balanced for a moment and half tried to remove his overcoat. The effort was too much and he sank into a chair, his hat dropping to the floor. His eyes closed and his head bent forward.

It was a littered little chamber, with papers strewn about and dirty clothes heaped on a trunk in the corner. The iron bed appeared not to have been made for several days, the spreads hanging off on the floor. The bureau was covered with collars and toilet articles, and cigarette stubs had burned small black holes in the white spread.

He sat for more than an hour, sometimes raising his head, and then letting it drop back. Dim morning light began to pry through the single window and out on the street were occasional sounds, indicating that alarms were going off and that the city entertained serious thoughts of getting up. In fact, the tendency became of local significance when a clock exploded in a room directly overhead.

Then Williams opened his eyes, held his hand to his head and stood up. He stared for a moment in bewilderment, but his features gradually cleared. Pulling off his gloves, he proceeded to the bureau where he

finally located a roll of bills in the top drawer. He passed unsteadily to the table where he made his last testament on a scrap of paper. "For my Funeral," he wrote, and placed the slip on the roll of bills. He produced the revolver and looked at it with a real affection. It was a finely-made instrument—the last remnant of family possessions.

For a few moments he stared vacantly, his black eyes grayish. He saw the newspaper and thought for the briefest second how the reporters might invade the place later in the day. Then he laughed, a self-despising little expression, and deliberately raised the revolver, pressing it against his head. His thin face twitched, and his whole body was vibrant with nervousness and suspense. He counted: "One—two—"

But Williams never reached the third count.

It was merely an advertisement in the paper spread out before him. Having caught the bold letters in the first line, he dropped the revolver and leaned intently over the paper.

"By God," he said, "I've got twenty-five dollars to go!"

He laughed immoderately, and read the advertisement again:

$75 — FUNERALS — $75

Complete in Every Detail, Including Grave in Any Cemetery, $75 up. Why pay More?

IN THE HOUR OF DISTRESS WE TREAT YOU WITH REFINEMENT AND COURTESY

Williams didn't finish reading it, but scrambled to his feet, dropping the bills and the revolver into his overcoat pocket. He picked up his hat from the floor, where it had fallen during his doze and hurried from the room.

"Twenty-five dollars to go!" he announced to the milkman in the lower corridor.

The city was now rubbing its eyes. Delivery wagons, auto trucks and workmen with pails were beginning to appear on the street. The sun appeared uncertainly between two buildings and a clock somewhere pounded six times. Williams was much steadier than he had been two hours before. He was a little unstable, to be sure, and it was with some difficulty that he tacked his way back to the saloon. He found a negro busy with a mop and chairs piled on the tables. The odor displeased him and he hurried back into the street.

He soon found himself before a furniture display window, looking at iron beds. One with shiny brass knobs struck him as a splendid example of bedcraft, but the price tag said $30, and he passed on.

Later he gazed into a window, the central object of which was a big green lamp with elaborate moss rose trimmings. A wretched woman was also looking at the display.

"How much do you suppose it costs?" he asked.

She smiled doubtfully.

"Damned pretty thing, that lamp," he murmured; "damned pretty thing."

Forgetting the woman, he went into the store, where a sleek little lad was sweeping out.

"Twenty-seven," announced the boy.

"Couldn't make it twenty-five, could you?" bargained Williams.

The boy was very sure that such a reduction was possible, but bosses don't arrive until eight. Williams wasn't quite sure that he wanted a lamp, anyway, and he passed along.

He lingered about shop windows and gazed into them with a pathetic hopelessness. He became discouraged and greatly sobered. Wandering aimlessly, his steps had led him back to the riverside street where his own rooming house was situated. Nor here were there any attractions for men about to die. It struck eight and Williams wondered if he had better go back and see about the lamp, when he found himself before the tombstone store on the corner. The darkness of early morning had given the shop a grim meaning, but now it stood out instantly as a solution. Besides, here was the girl's face smiling at him between two obelisks, as girls smile from the box offices of small theaters.

Tombstone shopping suddenly assumed unlooked-for attractions, and he entered straightway. The girl had a broom with which she had been digging around the bases of the monuments. She smiled again, more timidly than between the intervening obelisks. She was a delicate girl, and not very striking. She had uncertain brown eyes and indefinite brown hair. She looked Williams over, but didn't perceive that he was at all drunk, and never once dreamed that he expected to drive a bullet into his head as soon as he had disposed of twenty-five dollars. But she could not be criticized for any lack of insight on this score, for Williams was not exactly drunk, and at this particular time the revolver was most remote from his mind.

The Tombstone Girl only noticed that he was pale, well barbered and a little dissipated. But if a man is fair enough looking, well dressed and barbered, the average woman can overlook dissipation. Some of them even prefer it. And the Tombstone Girl was average.

He bowed politely, and she leaned her broom against a tombstone, waiting for him to speak.

It suddenly occurred to him that he was in a place of business, where people sell things and ring money into cash registers. He had come in to look at tombstones and said as much. She stepped forward to show him, asking if he had any particular pattern in mind.

"This looks like a pretty good one," he ventured, putting his hand on a large monument with ferns and cattails carved on one side, "how much?"

"I think that is three hundred dollars," she answered apologetically.

On the other side of the room were piles of small marble slabs. He fancied that the little ones were more his style and stepped over to them, followed by the girl.

"How much are these?" he asked timidly, touching one with his foot.

"They range from twenty to thirty-five dollars," she replied. "I think this one is especially dear," and she bent over to lift it to an upright position. In spite of its small size it was rather heavy and he zealously assisted her. Then they stood looking at each other. She was flushed by the exertion, and slapped her hands together to brush off the dust.

"Don't you think it is dear?" she asked finally.

"Oh, yes," he said; "pretty thing, that stone, da—— awfully pretty thing."

Then he actually did look at the stone. It was a plain white slab—as conventional a tombstone as can possibly be imagined. Its dusty white monotony was relieved only by a pair of clasped hands near the top.

"Isn't that er—a little out of date?" he suggested.

"No, indeed," she assured him; "a stone like that can never become old-fashioned, and if you don't care for the hands, we have several other patterns. There is a lamb design which is always good on a tombstone."

Williams had aristocratic notions about graveyards, and somehow neither clasped hands nor symbolic lambs made any appeal to his taste. He said that a larger stone might be more acceptable and she led the way to a small monument. It had a substantial base, and the top portion was very decently polished, with leafy pillars at the corners. This impressed him, and he inquired the price.

"That," she stated, "is one hundred dollars. You see, the polished ones come higher."

"Oh, it's most reasonable," he assured her, "extraordinarily reasonable. The polished ones come higher of course."

"It's a splendid stone," she said. "I've always wanted it for mother's grave."

Williams always did things by extremes—impassioned, impulsive things. He suddenly found himself sorry for the girl, and his pity was as sincere and wholesome as a high-pitched nature would allow.

"Couldn't some of the other relatives chip in?" he ventured, holding his chin thoughtfully.

"There aren't any other relatives," she explained, catching his sincerity and becoming confidential. "Of course, there is Uncle," she added. "He runs this store. He will be here soon, and if you wish to wait for him, he may make some reduction on this stone. You see, we're not having such a terrible rush in tombstones at this season."

They stood facing each other, leaning against opposite corners of the monument.

There was an awkward pause, during which Williams's mind subordinated the orgies of past years and became centered in this dingy universe of a tombstone shop. But the situation was hazy and the unraveling was interrupted by the girl, who asked if he would like to look at some more stones.

"No," he answered, "I guess not."

He studied her with a sane criticism. "I say, girl," he said, leaning toward her, "is that straight about the old lady's—about your mother's grave?"

He saw that he had been undiplomatic. "I'm sorry," he said in apology, "but I just wanted to say that I'll take this stone, this one here, the hundred dollar one."

The girl's face brightened with real candor. "I think that is—well, it is dear of you," she exclaimed; "it will help me to keep my job, for I have been here a whole week and I have sold just one tiny slab." In a busi-

ness-like fashion, she went to the table and took up a memorandum. He went over and sat on the edge of the table opposite her, somehow happy that it was dear of him.

"I suppose you want it engraved," she said.

"Yes, to be sure," replied Williams thoroughly startled from his reflections. "But, say, there isn't any hurry about this thing. Just let the engraving go for a while."

"Perhaps you will leave your name anyway," she suggested.

The gambler of family fortunes and honors is also a gambler of names. To all of his late associates, Williams had been plain "Jim," and it was with a tingling of pride that he stood erect and seized the lapel of his coat.

"My name," he announced, "is Williams—James E., Junior."

He was about to inquire the name of the girl, when a fussy woman in a filmy black veil entered the shop. Williams hastened to pay for his purchase, taking the roll of bills from his pocket and counting them out to her. He wanted to say something more, but the customer was fretting as customers do. Just then he startled himself with an idea.

"Miss—Miss Tombstone Girl," he faltered, "will you go to dinner with me to-night?"

The girl gave an affirmative nod.

"How's six?" he asked.

She nodded and rang the last wit of the Williams fortune into the varnished drawer of the cash register.

He left the store and got a last glimpse of her as she smiled from behind the confidence-inspiring obelisks. He walked lightly and smiled. On the corner he joined a group of people who were waiting for a car. He had no place in particular to go, but wanted to go somewhere. As the car approached, he saw the people getting out their purses and realized that he had left his last cent in the tombstone shop. He who cannot pay carfare should not ask women to go a-dining. Williams saw with a cold, startling lucidity, that his financial condition must be improved before evening.

A beautiful face makes a man resourceful. If the Tombstone Girl was not beautiful she was at least pretty and prettiness had the same effect on Williams.

Across the street was a little gray shop. It bore this sign:

ISAAC M. STEIN
PAWNBROKER

He passed over at once and drew the revolver from his pocket. He laughed slightly as he entered—a sane, sober, promising laugh—holding tenderly in his palm this last lucky remnant of family memories.

# The Souvenir Gun

BY LEONARD DEWITT SHERMAN

*You may have read some hold-up stories, you no doubt have, but for action, you will wager this dovble-cross,double-action story of a train hold-up is the last word.*

UCK and I sat by our tent in Split-rock Canyon smoking our after-dinner-cigarettes. Pontuello Creek, fresh and cold from the Pecos Mountains, swirled and tinkled directly in front of the camp. We had fished the stream industriously all morning, and eaten our fill of mountain trout, fried as only Mrs. Buck knew how, and now lazily awaited an inspiration to do the next necessary thing in the enjoyment of our holiday.

"Little Buck," a pocket-size edition of his daddy, played happily about the clearing with the care-free abandon of all youngsters. From the other tent, a little way up the stream, the mellow, full-throated voice of Mrs. McGraw, lilting a perfect happiness over her simple camp duties, floated sweetly down the canyon.

Buck, smilingly watching his small son busily building a corral of sticks for a hop-toad he had captured, suddenly lifted his voice.

"Sallie," he called, "oh, you Sallie-girl!"

The singing stopped and a pretty red head popped forth from the tent door in answer.

"What is it, hon'?" she asked smilingly.

"Git yo' li'l' ol' gun," replied Buck significantly.

The red head vanished, to almost instantly appear again, followed by the energetic figure of Mrs. Buck. She was fortified with a Colt's .45.

"What is it?" she cried anxiously. "Where?"

"Beyond that big rock," replied Buck calmly, "where Sonny has got that toad corralled."

Mrs. Buck paled in sudden fright, but the gun leaped and exploded; then she sank weakly to her knees as if they no longer had strength to support her. Buck sprang to his feet and went over and helped her into the tent.

"That's pretty good fo' Massachoosetts!" he joked, trying to calm her fears. "He's all right, girlie; don't yo' worry none."

Little Buck, startled for a moment by the shot, gazed big-eyed at the writhing form which threshed about the undergrowth, and then, with a sudden, unnamed fear, seized his toad and ran to his mother.

In a few minutes Buck appeared, carrying the gun and an oiled rag.

"She's a little excited now," he explained with a grin, "but she'll git over it."

"You're a lucky dog, Buck, to have a wife like that!" I exclaimed in admiration. "The sheer nerve of it!"

"Ain't Ah," he agreed as he resumed his old seat and proceeded to clean the pistol. "An' don' Ah know it!" he went on.

"What are those notches on the grip?" I queried, "rattlers?" He hesitated.

"N-o—those are men, Ah reckon. Yo needn't get excited," he observed, at my sudden exclamation. "This yere is a sooveneer gun."

"Tell me about it."

He rolled a cigarette and grinned reminiscently.

"Yo-all may have heard—mos' ever'body has, Ah reckon—of what a time Ah had gittin' the hobbles on mah bride?"

I laughed and nodded. That wooing had been the delight of New Mexico, from Raton Pass to the Mexican line.

"Chased her way back home to Massachoosetts, an' then had to rope, throw an' hog-tie her, as yo' might say. Not that she wasn't willin'," he chuckled, but as Ol' Columbia Bagby says:

"'She jes' wants to be chased, like all them red-headed ones. Go to it, Buck!' he advises. 'A sho't rope an' a wide loop does it ever' time.'

"She liked me all right," he went on in a bashful manner, "but she shied some at a few of our 'Western ways,' as she called 'em. The first time she visited the colonel's daughter, some durned tin-ho'n stuck up the stage, shot the guard an' copped the express box. O' co'se she had to be on that stage an' it scared her plumb cold. She was gun-shy from that minute. After ah got to know her, she wouldn't let me pack a gun when Ah was anywhere near her; so, mostly, Ah use to go gunless, Ah reckon."

"She doesn't seem to fear a gun much now," I suggested. "No," he replied, "she's a good shot now; as good as Ah am when she takes time, but Ah can still beat her on the draw an' at snap-shootin'. It's all come about since she married me. She declar'd she might as well learn to use one if she had to live with one all her life. An' yo' hear me! she certainly knows her way 'round with a six-gun, but it takes a show-down, like that rattler over there, to bring it out. Wait till Ah tell yo'.

"Ah went on to her home to be married, stoppin' over in New Yo'k on the way to get a couple rings at that Tiffany place. Man! she did love that li'l' gold ban' with the sparkler to hold it down, when Ah finally got 'em on to her. Comin' west from Chicago, we had the last section in the last car of the Limited. One ev'nin', after we'd fed up in the chuck-car, Ah takes Sallie back to the section an' tells her Ah'm goin' to hunt a smoke. Ah goes through three or fo' cars an' finally heads into a li'l' corral in the end o' one they calls a smokin' apartment, an' there Ah meets up with what looks to be an' proves to be, a bunch o' live ones. When Ah looks in an old-timer is swappin' lies with a Jew drummer an' another bald-topped gazabe. Ever' body looks up when Ah bulges in.

"'Mind if Ah throw-in with yo' fellows?' Ah asks. 'Ah'm aching fo' a smoke an' the colored superintendent says this yere is the only corral where he allows it. Got room fo' one mo'?'

"You bet!' replies the old-timer, makin' room fo' me on the big leather seat. The smoke is so thick you can chew it, an' Ah stumbles over the hoofs of another feller, who sits hunched up in the co'ner where Ah don't notice him.

"'Excuse me, amigo!' Ah apologizes; 'couldn't see yo' fo' smoke!'

"'That's all right, ol' hoss!' he sings out hearty. 'Climb right on. Ah sometimes walk on 'em myself.' Which shows a lovin' disposition on his part, to say the least. Ah beds down beside him, full o' good feelin's. Ah knows he's West the minute Ah hears his voice—an ex-puncher, likely. He passes me a cigar.

"'Yo' needn't shy at it,' he chuckles; 'I ain't tryin' to even up on you, none, for steppin' on me.'

"'No, Ah reckon not,' Ah laughs, strikin' a match.

"'What's your brand?' he inquires.

"'O T O Bar,' Ah says.

"'No!' he exclaims. 'How's old Stillwater Jones makin' it?'

"'Oh, he's jes' as deep as ever,' Ah returns, 'a li'l' deeper, in fact; he's promoted hisself an' bought a ranch. Yo' know him?' Ah asks.

"'I reckon!' he replies emphatically. 'We were bunkies about ten years back with the old Fryin' Pan outfit.'

"'In that case, you must be Lon Murray,' Ah exclaims. 'Ah've heard tell o' yo'. What's yo' line now?'

"He hesitates fo' a second, an' while Ah'm waitin' fo' his answer, Bald-top stops sho't in the middle of a sentence, an' turns to me askin' fo' a match.

"'I'm a—buyer, now,' Murray stammers. 'Buyin' cattle for a commission house in K. C. Guess I'll have to drop off with yo' an' see if I can land a shipment from the O T O. What yo' doin' 'round this neck o' the woods?'

"'Ah'm just bringin' mah new bride home.' Ah starts in to tell him, but jes' then the train jars to a standstill on a sidin' an' waits for the up train to pass.

"'Where are we?' inquires the drummer.

"'Just below Ratoon Pass,' answers the old-timer, 'an' we'll probably have some trouble here. They's usually a bunch of tramps on this sidin' waitin' for a chance to beat their way south for the winter. You'll hear the trainmen chasin' 'em in a minute.'

"The up train passes with a roar an' a shower o' sparks. Still our train don't move, none, an' Bald-top raises a window, like he wants to see what's goin' on, sticks his head out into the darkness an' says:

"'I wonder what we are waitin' for, now?' Then he backs in an' sits down agin.

"'Reckon the brakies are huntin' for hoboes,' puts in the old-timer. Murray squeezes mah arm.

"'Let's go look—see,' he suggests.

"We steps out into the accorjeon end o' the car, where he backs me into a corner an' whispers:

"'I'm some worried, son; I couldn't tell you in there, but I'm agent fo' the Lucky Jim mine, an' we got 50,000 dollars worth of bullion aboard. We're shippin' it to Frisco in the express car. I ought to go in there now an' help the agent ride herd on it. This siding is a dangerous spot.'

"'Can't Ah help?' Ah busts in. 'Gee, man! Toss me a gun an' Ah'm in this bigger'n a wolf.'

"'Yo' better stay out, this hand,' he advises. 'No tellin' how this game is rigged, an' yo' got a wife back there, yo' say.'

"'Yes, Ah know,' Ah shoots back, 'but she's way back in the las' car out o' danger. This ain't nothin' to git het up over, anyhow; if they are after anything it's the express. Man! yo' wouldn't turn down an O T O puncher this-a-way!'

"'Well,' he compromises, 'I'll tell yo' what yo' can do. I'll lend yo' a gun an' yo' keep an eye on Bald-top. I'm some leary o' that cuss. He's been tryin' to size me up all the evenin'. I think he suspicions what I'm doin' aboard, or else he's tryin' mighty hard to find out. I can't quite figger him out. Notice how he stopped his story to listen, when you asked what my line was?'

"'Yes,' Ah says, 'an' Ah'm mighty sorry 'bout that!'

"'Never mind, son,' he winds up; 'it was a natural question an' there's no harm done yet. Beat it back now. Adios.'

"Jes' then the train starts, an' as Murray goes forward, Ah sticks the gun in mah belt an' steps back into the smoke-house. As Ah goes in, the drummer was jes' tyin' down one o' his that-reminds-me stories, and also doin' most of the laffin'. Bald-top had changed his seat an' is settin' in Murray's corner. The old-timer still clings to his tip-tilted chair, with his feet piled on the aige of the wash-bowl. Bald-top jumps as Ah pushes through the curtain, an' has his hand half way to his gun befo' he sees who it is; then he tries to cover up by goin' after his han'kerchief.

"'Your friend turned in?' he asks casually, as Ah sits down beside him.

"'Yes,' Ah answers; 'Lon's huntin' his blankets. Says ridin' a train frazzles him out.'

"The train begins to slow down an' finally stops. Sounds o' runnin' steps flashes by the car. Bald-top gits up an' sticks his head outen the winder agin.

"'*Whang!*' cracks a six-shooter outside, an' Baldy ducks back into a shower of glass, that sprays all over the place. He pulls his gun in earnest this time an' blazes away through the window. Ah was some surprised, but Ah couldn't connect up anything Baldy was doin' with a hold-up of the express car, so Ah decides to lay low an' watch which way the cat is goin' to jump, an' nail him if necessary. Then Ah happens to look at the Jew.

"He's down on all fours, tryin' to crawl under the leather seat an' stuff a roll o' bills into the top of one shoe at the same time. He couldn't have done either in a thousand years, but he tries jes' as hard. It was dead funny. About that time, somebody sticks two forty-fives in the doorway back of us an' hollars:

"'Nds up!'

"'Well, mah gosh!' Ah shouts, some disgusted at bein' caught watchin' the wrong cat; but jes' the same, not forgettin' to clamp mah han's over the top of mah haid. 'This looks like a reel shore-enough hold-up. Who in blazes granted yo' a license?' Ah asks.

"'Softly, kid, softly!' replies the road-agent.

"He was a big strappin' cus, with his Stetson pulled over his eyes, an' his silk neckerchief pulled up over his nose, bradin' pen fashion. One of his guns points at the pit o' mah stummick an' the other at Bald-top, who has settled back on the seat next the window, with his gun in one hand.

"'You—Baldy!' snapped the hold-up, 'jes' reach over an' drop that six-gun outen the window. Careful, now! Right! Now, yo' kid, drop yo' gun with the tips of yore fingers an' toss it outside. That's the boy!' He looked at the Jew.

"'What's little Brighteyes doin' under the seat?' he chuckles. 'That's no place to put money, amigo. Toss it here an' let me take care of it for yo'. Some one will rob yo' shore, if yo' flash yore money 'round careless like that-a-way.' Ah had to laff.

"'That's it!' Ah shouts, 'put it in the savin's bank while yo' got a chance!' The road-agent whirls on me.

"'Yore turn, now, kid; loosen up an' le's see what yo' got to put out at interest!' Mah laff kinder peeters out.

"'Say, yo' long-legged galoot, do Ah look like Ah had money?' Ah hollars, gittin' madder ever' minute. Ah plumb overlooks the fact that Ah'm due to git shaken down. Ah had a notion to take a chance an' climb him. If it ain't fo' that gun, gee! It looks as big as a cannon an' she's pinted right at mah stummick. That gets mah nerve ever' time. That's no place in the world to pint a gun! The hold-up is eyein' me steady an' his face begins to git hard.

"'Well!' he snaps.

"'Say, hombre!' Ah tries to stall him along, 'jes' as a personal favor, would yo' mind elevatin' that forty-five a trifle,—up to where Ah can look into it, say? If yo' git careless with that there trigger, yo' shore goin' to mix up my digestive apparatus some!'

"'If yo' can count ten seconds, yo' know how long yo' got to live!' he states coldly, 'an' yore stummick won't do yo' no good after that!'

"'Oh well!' Ah replies, 'if that's the way yo' feel about it, Ah reckon Ah'll have to come through!' an' Ah tosses him what's left of mah roll.

"'Yore turn, Baldy!' grins the two-gun. 'Le's see if that's a roll of bills you got stowed away in that side pocket.'

"Bald-top sticks a tremblin' han' into his coat pocket an' drills the road-agent through the off eye, in one motion, shootin' through the cloth! It turns out he has a little automatic cached away in there.

"'I couldn't do that again in a hundred years,' states Bald-top, calmly, as the road-agent crumples at the knees an' slides forward on his face, too dead to skin.

"'Ah should say *not!*' Ah shouts. 'Man! yo' took a long chance!'

"'Keep yore hands up!' warns Bald-top suddenly, pintin' the automatic in mah direction.

"'Well, for the love o' tripe!' Ah hollers, 'here's another one! Was you took sudden this-a-way, or is this a premeditated jump?'

"'Nothin' sudden about me 'cept my shootin',' grins Baldy. 'I reckon my companaros must have cleaned out the express car by now, so I'll mosey along. I guess we didn't fool you

up some!' he boasts. 'I dunno who this tall, wall-eyed hold-up is. He must have set into the game on his own hook. Adios.'

"'Put 'em up!' says someone from nowhere. Instead of elevatin' his han's like he's told, which proves he didn't have no real savvy, Bald-top whirls in surprise, an' keeps on whirlin' ontil he sags down into a corner, dead as Jonah.

"'*Boom!*' thunders a forty-five an' the old-timer steps lightly out o' the toilet room with a smokin' Colt in his fist. Things were comin' so fast, Ah plumb overlooks him in the mix-up.

"'Say!' Ah yells, 'Ah'm goin' to have nervous prosperity if this keeps up! Can Ah put mah han's down now, or are yo' one of them things, too?'

"'It's all right, son,' laughs the old-timer. 'Put 'em way down an' git that hold-up's guns an' we'll go out forward an' see how the express agent is makin' it. Sounds like he might need some help.'

"We stampedes out, regardless, fallin' over the feet o' the Jew, who still lays huddled on the floor with his head stuck under the seat like a chicken, thinkin' he's hid, Ah reckon. We finds a battle ragin' up near the express car, but they hadn't got into it. Murray is onderneath with one arm busted, but still doin' business with his bes' shootin' han'. One of them had stuck up the engin' crew. The old-timer bumps him off in sho't order an' then we stays with the crew ontil they gits the train to movin'. We crawls back over the coal car an' fin's Murray in with the agent, who is fondlin' an eight-gage gun an' don't have a scratch to show fo' the fuss. When we gits back into the smokin' apartment we discovers Bald-top an' the road-agent layin' there with all their pockets turned inside out."

"What became of the Jew drummer?" I asked.

"He was gone," chuckled Buck. "Yes, indeedy! He was some possum! It seems, after we leaves, he gits up an' prospects Baldy an' the hold-up fo' ever'thing they has, an' then goes right plumb through the train, like the grace o' heaven through a camp-meetin', passin' the contreebution box as he goes; an' seein' he packs a gun an' appears sudden like, most all the congregation donates. We-all follars his trail through, an' he leaves plenty o' sign, too! Yo'-all could tell jes' where he's been an' what he's done by merely lookin' at them passengers. Some of 'em still sets with their han's up, thinkin' we's another relay, Ah reckon. Some was crouched between the seats, an' others, in the made-up berths, is rolled up in their blankets. When Ah discovers that this stick-up is fo' the purpose o' goin' through the passengers as well as the express car, Ah begins to get some worried about Sallie, an' heads hot-foot fo' the las' car, follared by the old-timer.

"Befo' we gits there, though, the train slows up fo' a station an' the sheriff comes bulgin' in an' stops us."

"'Seen anything o' Slim Behr?' he questions, fingerin' his gun, an' lookin' like he hoped he warn't too late.

"'What's he look like?' asks the old-timer.

"'Fat; black headed!' snaps the sheriff. 'He's a Jew.'

"The old-timer looks at me some foolish—an' Ah reckon Ah returns it.

"'My gosh! Anything special yo' want him fo'?' he asks the sheriff.

"'You bet I want him!' exclaims the officer. 'Five thousand up for him, dead or otherwise. He's wanted in three states. He's the worst dad-binged hold-up west o' the Missouri. Him an' a bald-headed son-of-a-gun known as Slippery Pete, work the trains on the sidin' with a gang who pass as hoboes, workin' their way south. Jes' had a wire from the Pass sayin' he was suspected o' bein' a-board—'

"'Let me by, sheriff,' Ah butts in. 'Ah got a wife back here in the last car.'

"Jes' then a brakie, who comes up durin' our talk, cuts in:

"'All right, sheriff,' he says, 'guess we got your man out on the back platform. He tried to take a diamond ring away from a lady in the last berth an' she jes' snatched his gun away an' backed him up into a corner!"

Buck passed me the weapon he'd been cleaning.

"An' that there's the gun," he chuckled.

# Blessed are the Poor

BY STUART B. STONE

*Two men on the ocean in an open boat—one rich, the other poor—both love the same girl. The penniless one playing a long chance, sells his share of fresh water for the other's fortune. Both are rescued. Who wins the girl?*

THE sun of twenty-two north had been shedding its superheated rays upon the little open boat for two hours, when Wynant roused. His first action was to mutter, "Water—water—quick!" his next, to jerk a large tin can to his swollen lips. He licked through the jagged opening at the fluid now more precious than any rare attar; then, remembering Gantz, crumpled in the stern, he drew the can from his mouth, strove with his conscience, and acted decently. Gantz sat up just in time to see the life-giving liquid replaced in the bottom of the boat.

He shook his clenched fist at Wynant. "Confound you, Bob! You're a pig and a coward."

"Shut up!" snapped Wynant. "I could have swilled the whole of it. It's your turn now."

Gantz grabbed up the can. After the first gulp, the other laid hands upon it. "Hold on—I just wet my tongue, Sam. We're bound to make it last."

Gantz held fast. "Let go—I must have it—I'll die!"

Wynant clapped his hand upon the other's throat. He knew just where and how to close down on a windpipe, and a second or so later, he deposited the water-can in the bow behind him. Gantz glared at the stronger man, then the lines of his face relaxed.

"You're right, Bob. Help me to die half way like a man."

Wynant nodded understandingly. Both turned to crane about at the horizon in the forlorn hope of dim, blue peak or low-lying gray beach. There was nothing. Only the hungry ocean seemed to lap and lick at the derelict boat in anticipation of the coming morsel. Wynant sighed, then began to drum idly on the side of the boat. Gantz watched the proceedings irritably.

"Cut it out," he growled finally. "Let's take another drink—a big one—and see what happens."

Wynant reached behind him, but brought his hand out empty. "No," he said, shaking his head, "let's figure the odds first."

His companion threw back his head and laughed unmirthfully. "You're the original optimist, Bob. The odds are just the billions of tons of brine out there to the quart of *aqua pura* in the can.'

"There's a chance,—maybe," insisted Wynant. "A slim chance—for one."

Gantz's blood-marked eyes narrowed. Wynant relapsed into deep study and appeared to be making calculations with the aid of his fingers.

"As near as my muddled brain can estimate," he said finally, "it's been three days and nights since we got away from the Equatoria in this dinky boat which everybody else had overlooked. That's just guessing—I can't tell how much time we've spent in this delirium that passes for sleep. The currents and the winds have been sweeping us steadily southward. The Santa Ynez Islands ought to be dead ahead to the south. It's a matter of three or four days more—maybe a little longer—if old Lady Ocean out there doesn't get her temper ruffled."

Gantz shook his head. "It won't do, Bob. We ate the last bite we had two days ago. We're weak. The water couldn't pull us through."

"There's a long chance that the water might pull one through. Cut that chance squarely in two—" Wynant made an expressive gesture.

Gantz studied the gently-rolling ocean for some minutes. "And Eleanora?" he asked.

Wynant stared questioningly at the man in the stern. "She got away in the first boat with the sailors, right after we rammed the derelict. They had oars and sails. She ought to be on dry land this minute. I'd bet three to one on the proposition."

For a long time the other kept his head in his hands. When he spoke, it was without raising his face. "Of course, you're the one best bet for Eleanora, Bob. You're worth a hundred thousand dollars if you're worth a cent. You can give her the things she's been used to, the comforts and pleasures that are bread and drink to her. I have nothing. But I want her —God help me!"

"You're the better looking—and you've a way with women," countered Wynant. "She might choose you—and want me when it was too late."

Gantz glared. "Confound you and your money."

"It's a precious lot of good out here," gloomed Wynant.

There was a period of silence, in which an unreasoning mutual hatred sprang up between these two old college friends. "I could take the blooming stuff, Sam," said Wynant. "I was always the stronger."

"You could never drink it," growled the other. "I'd manage to spill it for you."

Wynant curled up in the bow of the lazily-rocking boat.

"Don't go to sleep," snapped Gantz. "I'm apt to drink that water."

"If you do—" growled Wynant, shaking his fist.

"Hush!" snarled Gantz. "We're talking too much. It makes us thirstier."

"Hang it all! We'll each take another good swig right now," said Wynant, reaching for the can.

The man in the stern hurled himself at his half-prostrate companion. "No, you don't! We've got to save it. Remember Eleanora. You said there was a chance for one."

Wynant turned over and doubled up, growling and fuming. Gantz dropped in the stern. Within another minute, both had drifted into the feverish delirium which had mercifully passed so much of the time. An hour, two hours passed, while the ancient ocean gently heaved her boundless breast and the tropic sun sent down its furnace rays. Both men muttered

in their sleep, crying now for water, and now murmuring the name of the girl who was probably safe beneath the fronded palms to the south. When they again awakened, both were perceptibly weaker. This time, Gantz reached for the water-can. He had no more than wet his blue lips when Wynant pulled it away. Gantz dropped his body over against the other and prevented him from getting more than a taste of the liquid.

"Don't be—a hog—because you can, Bob," he gasped.

Wynant struck his fellow-traveller with his clenched fist three or four times, but put down the can. Both strained again for the land that would not rise from the sea.

"What's that?" shouted Gantz, pointing toward a gray mist that sat upon the southwestern ocean.

Wynant peered. "Clouds—you're seeing things." Both men talked with difficulty. There followed a long, sullen silence.

Wynant finally spoke. "What the deuce are we going to do about that water?"

Gantz raised his head from his hands. He looked with his bloodshot eyes straight into Wynant's. "You think you've the correct dope, Bob—about there being enough water to pull one through, but not enough for two?"

"I didn't say that," growled Wynant. "There's a slim chance for one. Divide it, and neither has the chance of a snowball at the equator."

"Then I want to make you a proposition. I've a half-interest in that can of water. I'll sell it to you for one hundred thousand dollars. I imagine that's about your pile."

Wynant barked out a kind of a laugh. "Say, five dollars a drop. Your nerve holds up well, Sam."

Gantz leaned forward, pointing a dirty, trembling forefinger at the other. "What good is your hundred thousand if you die like a dog in this boat—and never see—her?"

Wynant's face darkened. "What good would it do you? You can't last much longer without water."

"I'll take the long chance. If I were safe on shore, I couldn't ask her to marry me. And if you were there with your confounded hundred thousand—well, Eleanora's human."

Wynant looked out to sea, seeming to ponder the problem. The other watched him keenly. Both men licked with dry tongues at their dryer lips.

"It's all in your favor, Bob," urged Gantz. "With your constitution, you'll pull through with all the water. And if I cash in my checks, why you'll still have your money—and—and Eleanora."

Wynant shook his head. "No, I couldn't do it. It's too caddish. It would be the same as murdering you. We'll drink the water and live or die alike. Keep a stiff upper lip, Sam. Maybe a miracle will happen."

Gantz wrung his hands, brandished his fist in Wynant's face, grabbed and weakly attempted to shake him. "No, no, no, blast you! I won't touch a drop. Listen. It's a square deal, Bob. You needn't get so altruistic. You're paying enough for the stale, hot stuff—five dollars a drop. Life's no good to me without that hundred thousand—without her. What's the good of us both dying, if we can save one? I

won't touch a drop anyhow—I swear it!"

Wynant protested again and again, and at each protest Gantz insisted more fiercely. The very fierceness of his insistence was weakening him. A mad delirium brightened his eyes. His hands shook. Finally Wynant turned on him petulantly.

"Ask a decent price and I'll consider it. I'm getting mighty thirsty."

"The hundred thousand—nothing less," declared Gantz.

"Give you twenty-five thousand."

Gantz shook his head.

"Fifty."

"No, no, no."

"A hundred thousand dollars then—and little good it will ever do you. I'm going to take a drink."

Gantz grabbed the other's hand. "Hold on—I want a written contract. Your word's all right, Bob, but this delirium might make a man forget—or somebody might die."

Wynant sneered. "What are you going to write it with, sea water?"

"Haven't you a pencil—a fountain-pen?"

"No."

"I suppose you've blood in your veins yet. I can scratch it out."

Gantz fumbled in his pockets until he produced a pen knife and a cabinet-size photograph of a beautiful young woman. The other watched him darkly.

"Here, stick it into your arm—keep clear of the arteries," directed Gantz. "I'll dictate, without any 'whereas' or 'in consideration of.'"

Wynant took the pearl-handled toy and gouged recklessly at his bare arm. With the welling blood he followed Gantz's dictation, tracing a rough, red scrawl on the back of the photograph:

"I owe Samuel Gantz $100,000 for his half-share of water in boat adrift in Pacific about 20 north, 160 west."

Gantz took back the photograph, wiped off the surplus blood and placed it carefully in an inner pocket. Wynant took up the water-can and looked at it as if it possessed some evil charm. Presently he lifted it to his lips and lapped at the contents, once, twice. Gantz watched the proceedings, purling and snarling like a tiger-cat. Then Wynant pulled the can from his lips, twirled it about in his hands, swung his arm back and flung the thing far out into the sea.

"I'll die a man—a poor man," he said quietly.

As the can splashed into the sea, Gantz laughed harshly. "That's right—fill up the ocean!" The next instant he turned on Wynant. "You fool—you blithering, gibbering, doddering fool!" he raged. They fought madly, blindly, tooth, nail and foot, while the boat rocked. Once, as Wynant flopped the weaker man back into the stern, the frail craft shipped gallons of water. After a bit, the two, exhausted beyond the point of further struggling, fell apart. Wynant tumbled into the bow and went off into delirium, mumbling something about fishing the water-can from the bottom of the sea; Gantz lay, face to the mounting sun, and murmured over and over, "I'm going to live—live—live—live—"

The day wore on. The sun blazed almost overhead, then dipped down,

down, out China way. The two men spent the long, hot hours in a babbling fever-dream interrupted by starting-up fits in which they raved and fought. After a while this gave way to a deep slumber, a slumber too profound to suit any physician.

Toward sunset the slight southward breeze stiffened. The gentle undulations of the sea lengthened and heightened. The boat rocked considerably, almost to the point of upsetting, and rolled its stupefied passengers about. Far to the south a gray-blue mist showed dimly, grew larger, took on solidity, assumed island-shape. A strong current assisted the wind in carrying the boat swiftly shoreward. Lofty hills, covered with spiked and fronded vegetation, loomed up. The boat made slantingly for a beach of clean shingle. Finally a big roller took the frail thing, lifted it high into the air and let it down upon the beach with a jolt that flung its swooning occupants well up the easy incline and hurled them out of the shadow of death.

Wynant was the first to arouse. He raised himself upon his elbow and mumbled something about Eleanora Kemper having sold the water-can to a whale. A dash of spray whipped him in the face, stinging him into life. Gantz was just opening his eyes. Wynant heard a rippling, trickling murmur of running water. At first he imagined it a continuation of the fever-dream, but it kept up. He looked about him and saw where a brook cut its way through rock and sand to the sea. He crawled slowly toward the stream and let his hot head droop from the bank while he gurgled and lapped at the cold, fresh water. The liquid filled his eyes and ears, choked him, almost strangled him, but he continued to dangle his head in it, rolling and splashing it about in crazy fashion. Finally he remembered Gantz. He struggled to his feet and stumbled back. Gantz's eyes were shut. Wynant bent over him and tried to rouse him. The eyes opened again, but the lids drooped back in spite of Wynant's vigorous shaking. The stronger man, using every bit of his slightly revived strength, dragged the sleeper to the brookside and soused his head in the water, pinched, slapped, pounded him into consciousness. When Gantz could sit alone, Wynant foraged along the beach. He found two cocoanuts. They ripped the husks from these, ate the meat greedily, and drank more of the water. Then, with little curiosity as to where they were, they found a nook in the thick, fragrant tangle, and slept, soundly and naturally. To Gantz, it seemed that as he slept, he heard the chatter of human voices along the strand below them.

When Gantz awakened, streaks of sunlight were filtering down through leaves of cocoa-palm and mango. Wynant was standing by his side, regarding him with a queer expression.

"They're here," announced Wynant. "Get up—Crœsus."

The title caused Gantz, in sudden remembrance, to feel for the photograph. It was safe. He smiled grimly. "As a navigator, Bob, you're a failure—or else these islands have moved northward several days' journey." He looked at the other in sudden uneasiness. "They were your own

calculations, though. You can't say I tricked you."

Wynant scowled. "I stand by my bargain. You can get the whole blooming boat crew to witness it now, if you're afraid."

"A mighty bad bargain for you, Bob."

"I'm strapped," said Wynant. "I'm not whining."

Gantz shrugged his shoulders. "I took a long chance—a hundred to one, as it seemed. I won. I'm sorry, Bob, but—well, I won."

"Leave off the sympathy," growled Wynant. "Let's wash up, breakfast, and let her settle the whole thing here and now."

After the meal of cocoanuts, as they walked briskly toward a point on the beach where smoke curled lazily skyward, Wynant stopped suddenly. "Suppose—suppose Eleanora should be influenced by the thought of my wealth—that is, the wealth I once had—and—and made her selection accordingly. She's human, Sam. It would be hardly fair to her." He considered for a moment. "Nor to me."

"You'd both be stung, Bob," put in Gantz. "And I should be rich in gold and poor in everything else."

"She ought to know about the changed status of things," said Wynant.

"Then, if she were—as you say, human—she might take me for the hundred thousand, and I shouldn't want her that way, Bob."

"She ought to know," said Wynant doggedly.

"Ye-e-es," Gantz gave in, grudgingly.

They stepped around a clump of palms and almost collided with Eleanora Kemper. She stopped in her tracks, both hands raised slightly, ripe mouth open, and the fine brown eyes growing big with surprise, conjecture, joy. Both men watched keenly to see for whom the brown eyes held this glad light of recovery, but they could not tell.

"Oh, I am glad—glad!" she cried. "It is wonderful. I thought you were lost—both—both lost!"

She stepped forward and extended a hand to each. Wynant made the explanation of their presence in fifty short words.

"We want to know—whether you care for either of us like—like we both want you to care," blurted Gantz.

"And if it's one of us, which one?" added Wynant.

Eleanora Kemper drew back, stunned with surprise. "Here—now?" she gasped. "Why—why—at this time and place?"

"We want to know," said Wynant. "There's something happened between us. We just want to know—now—here."

"There won't be any trying to persuade you—nor anything unpleasant said or done," put in Gantz. "But we both feel like we just have to know. We both—I love you."

"You've known that always," said Wynant. "It's a little rough on you here, at this time, maybe; but, surely, you could indicate which—if either."

"Yes," said Gantz, "which—if either."

At the first of this, the girl had shrunk from them as if they had suddenly become a different order of

creature. But as their tones grew earnestly pleading, gently urgent, she seemed to understand. She stood, hesitant, an appealing figure in bedraggled gown, the mass of loose, black hair streaming about the bare, tanned neck. It was some minutes before she spoke.

"I think—yes, I know I'm glad you have said these things. Before our party started on this tour, back there in the old life of gayety, nothing but gayety, I'd probably have resented it. But it seems to me a hundred years ago that we sat upon the deck of the Equatoria and listened to the orchestra playing that Viennese waltz just before everything happened. That was another world—a world not half so real and true as this. I feel somehow, that this casting away is just the real beginning of my life—that I had merely danced and laughed before. I sat in the boat through the long hours and watched those strong, silent sailormen rowing, pulling the rest of us helpless creatures out of the greedy jaws of the sea, and I thought about my life back there—all frills and fancy trimmings, nothing real, nothing vital. And—and I think the thoughts that came to me out there, and the awakening I experienced, and the resolutions I formed, as I watched those sturdy men who could do things, have helped me to make my decision—here—now—between you two."

She stopped and looked searchingly from one to the other.

"There was one thing I forgot to say—" began Wynant; but she silenced him with a wave of the hand.

"Because you are so wealthy and because you would naturally lead me back to the frills and fancy trimmings—"

"Wait," interrupted Gantz, "we agreed to tell you—"

"And because Sam is poor," she went on, unheeding, "with a fight to make in the world, needing the help and sympathy that I long to give now to some good man—"

"Hold on—listen—things have changed!" shouted Bob Wynant.

"And maybe not altogether because of these things—but to a great extent I know—because I have always hesitated between you—"

"Stop! You don't understand!" cried Wynant.

"I choose Sam," finished Eleanora Kemper. She stepped forward and reached forth her hand to Gantz.

To her wonderment, Gantz hesitated and did not grasp her hand nor give her the expected kiss. He was fumbling in every pocket he possessed, fumbling for something which required an age-long minute in the finding. Finally, he produced a photograph, the face of which she could not see, but upon the back of which she could see a red scrawl. Gantz held the picture above his head, then started to tear it asunder. Wynant sprang at him.

"No, no, no—it's yours! You have to keep it—you can't escape!"

But Gantz was too quick. The tropic breeze whisked away a hundred pieces of torn cardboard before Wynant could pinion the other's wrists. Realizing the situation, Wynant drew back. Gantz reached for the waiting hand and drew her to him. For a minute, Bob Wynant watched them, then he turned and walked away.

# The Marble Medium

BY OSCAR LEWIS

*The moral to this story is in the last paragraph and it's a good one. But a better moral is in the fibre and soul of the story. It has to do with the truth that what we can't sense, we hate.*

ENTLE reader, did you ever carry a hundred-and-forty pound hod up three flights of tapering ladders? Did you ever push a wheelbarrow full of mortar up a plank that bears down at you from a thirty degree angle? Did you ever dip a hoe into a steaming trough of slaking lime? If you have done these things, did you keep it up nine hours a day and twenty-seven days a month? Did you?

If so, how did you spend the other four days? Did you read helpful books? Did you attend the church on the rise of the hill or the band concert in the park? And did you now and then draw your young daughter—who was your little girl but the day before yesterday—down on the low stool beside you and stroke her hair, which she no longer wears in pig-tails, and smile down into her eyes and laugh with her and talk with her, and to her—and about her?

In short, did you make her understand that this father person was a human being and a friend and that he might care really, and caring—be interested? Did you do these things on those days that were not of the twenty-seven? Did you? Jim O'Neil didn't. He got drunk.

And because he got drunk—which, by the way, was a very wrong thing to do and one that the reader should condemn absolutely, and probably will, unless he himself happens to know the dank, grinding weightiness of wet mortar—because he got drunk on his days off and became fixed in his daughter's mind as the "Old Man" when he might have been Dad, because he did this, he crowned with a great happiness a life that otherwise would almost certainly have been drab, dull—surely stupid.

Had it ever occurred to Cassy O'Neil to regard her only parent as anything beyond the stolid person who slept in the big bed nights and who shuffled out wearily each morning and shuffled in still more wearily ten hours later, and who was the direct cause for sundry meals and endless cleanings up; had it occurred to her to look upon her father differently, she would probably have become friendly with him—for he was really a good sort—and finally confidential. Then there would have been an awful rumpus and Jim O'Neil would have sworn earnestly, and his daughter's life would not have known the great happiness.

Jim O'Neil's way of living did not tend towards the development of a broad outlook upon life. He was not of the thinkers. He worked with his

head only infrequently and the result was never wholly satisfying. He handled thoughts clumsily. He could not range them systematically nor pile nor sift them logically. They were cumbersome things to be mawed over laboriously, deliberately, and always one at a time. He was heavy, clouded, dull—and unsurmountably, unalterably prejudiced.

His daughter Cassy, on the other hand, was something of a philosopher. Her surroundings, habit of environment—everything—made for a serious view of life, for solemnity. Materialism that was pitilessly uninspired made life a bare, sober reality. There was nothing to encourage the spectacles of rosy hue. Yet Cassy, in the midst of this atmosphere, and of it, was blithe, airy, winsome. She was on this account no strange phenomenon, no rose springing from a garbage heap, nor any such freak. She was just a blithe young human being who was being blithe and young and human and if Jim O'Neil had asked her on that first Sunday evening what she had been doing, she would have told him unhesitatingly.

But Jim O'Neil did not ask her on that Sunday evening, nor on Monday evening, nor on any of the evenings succeeding. And when finally he did find out, the thing had been going on for four weeks to the day. And the person who told him was not Cassy at all.

John Kelsey was probably little versed in the technique of the dramatic denouement. When he had some news to tell, however, he generally managed to deliver its full value.

"Wonder if Jim's girl has made him acquainted with her bohemian friends yet. Has she, Jim?"

It was early in the evening. The sawdust on the floor was just beginning to be kicked under the card tables and the floor itself kept a perfectly even keel. There was only one row of buttons on the bartender's coat and it was clear that this was no time for foolish argument. Jim O'Neil must have five beers before he could talk. And he was only beginning his third.

"Of course it ain't none of my affair," continued John Kelsey with vast seriousness, "but as a man of family myself, I say to you, Jim O'Neil, that you can't be too careful. Cassy's been a good girl and a dutiful girl and when the wife tells me as how she's been going down to Samson Street every day for the last month and being sculped, I says that it was a shame and that the next time I saw Jim O'Neil I'd tell him so.

" 'You and me and Jim O'Neil is one kind of folks' I tells the wife, 'and Cassy's like us. And these painters and sculptors is another kind altogether, and Cassy's devilish pretty. And,' I says to her, 'you can mark my word, there ain't going to be no good come of it.'

" 'Oh, it ain't so bad,' says the wife. 'Cassy tells me as how she gets lonesome staying alone in the house all day. And then these friends are all so nice to her. The child likes to be noticed, and besides, it pleases the dear to have her pretty face copied.'

" 'Face,' I repeats, 'hum-m-m! Wife, it's little you know of it.'

" 'John,' says she quickly, 'John, what do you mean?' "

" 'Nothing at all,' says I. 'Remem-

ber the time we went to the museum at Golden Gate Park?'

"'Yes.'

"'Well,' says I, 'you saw the statues.'

"The wife didn't answer for a minute. Just stood and looked. 'John,' she says finally, speaking kind of soft like, for she and Cassy was good friends, 'John, it's a shame.'

"'It is, indeed,' I tells her."

Jim O'Neil had said not a word. But he was not at ease. Something warned him that he was not following all that John Kelsey was saying. He raised his thick glass slowly, thinking painfully. And then the glass stopped and Jim O'Neil held it poised, its brim level with his chin, while realization slowly came to him. Very slowly and carefully he sat the glass down upon the damp bar. Very carefully and slowly he laid a dime and two nickles down beside it.

And then he walked out; head forward tilted, eyes on the floor; very quietly and very deliberately, but with menace in the rolling slump of his shoulders.

Cassy O'Neil, sleeve rolled up above a dimpled elbow, dipped an inquiring hand into the soapy warm water of the dish pan, rotated it, and pulled out a final fork. Then she poured the water out and tilted the empty pan against the side of the sink. The water coasted down the drain, surprising the air somewhere below and driving it out with a swishy, sucking sound—a sound that prevented Cassy's hearing the soft opening and closing of the outer door.

She picked up the drying towel and was reaching for a cup when a quick, unfamiliar step in the short hall caused her to turn.

In the threshold bulked the form of her father. His eyes looked into hers and there was that in their expression which caused a fear-tightening of her throat. She fell back a few indecisive steps and at this confession of fear, Jim O'Neil advanced into the room. He moved quickly and not awkwardly, and there was about him something of finality, something that suggested the inexorable workings of a great basic law. Inflexible, stern, and yet impartial; more terrible than sinister, and merciless rather than cruel.

Cassy, hands gripping the edge of the table behind her, raised to her father's, a face that was frankly frightened. He, noting nothing, took her by the arm and led her half resistingly into the other room. There she sat on the extreme edge of her small bed and regarded him silently. Slowly and with stolid face he pulled from the back of the closet a wicker telescope basket. This he placed on the floor and into it emptied the contents of the upper drawer of the oak veneered dresser. With this he placed the two or three dresses from the closet. Finally he added some articles —comb, brush, mirror—from the top of the dresser and with them he, after some hesitation, placed a small picture in a dented silver frame. The picture was of Cassy's mother. He then fitted the cover on and strapped it down, tucking the ends under the strap and out of the way.

Taking the basket from the floor, he motioned for her to precede him out into the hall. Her coat and little

black velvet hat hung on the tiny hall rack. He took them down and passed them to her one by one.

"Put them on," he said.

It was the first word that he had spoken. Cassy had said nothing whatever, though she once or twice raised her hand and brushed it waveringly across her forehead.

She put on the coat and hat, and when he opened the door, stepped outside. He sat the basket down in the entry beside her and closing the door, bolted it. He stood still for a moment until he heard her turn the door knob and soon after go slowly down the steps. Then he went back to the kitchen.

It could not have been more than a week or so later that Jim O'Neil paid a visit to the home of a prominent millionaire. His purpose was not social, but business. Jim O'Neil understood this perfectly and allowed the servant to lead him through devious hallways and paths to a white building in the midst of the battlemented garden.

The place was fitted with a magnificence that took his breath away, but when the servant entered boldly into it, Jim took a firmer grasp upon his box of tools and materials and followed in his wake.

In an alcove off the great main room, they came upon a not very large group of men and women standing before a cylindrical column of white cloth.

This, though Jim O'Neil could not be expected to know it, was a rather important event that took place from time to time within the white building on the millionaire's grounds. Its importance lay in this: whenever this group was gathered here, it meant that the millionaire had secured something else worthy of adding to his collection of American art.

It was probably due to the millionaire's native courtesy (and not, as many thought, because of his fondness for giving a theatrical tinge to his deeds,) that he always chose this means of making the acquisition public. Surely it could have been nothing but courtesy that prompted him to invite these critics to view and to pass upon his judgement. And to pass judgement was really what they did, for it was always in their presence and always after they had expressed approval of the work, that its real, its actual addition to the collection took place—that the painting was bracketed to the wall or the statue sealed to its base. As to the miniature unveiling that preceded this, well, perhaps the millionaire's leaning toward the mildly spectacular was evident here.

The servant halted Jim O'Neil at a decently respectful distance and there bade him wait.

The millionaire, a reasonably young appearing man with a satisfying brown Vandyke, was talking.

"Clara Boone, to my mind," he was saying, "has never done anything finer. The spirit that she has caught here does not seem to be something which she deliberately set out to obtain. It makes one feel rather, that she found these things actually existing somewhere and they so delighted her that she copied them down with a joyful fidelity. The refreshing, unconscious grace, the exquisite purity of youth and beauty—the sheer, airy winsome-

ness of it—seem to be inherently a part of the subject."

This much Jim O'Neil heard, but the words held no interest for him and his thoughts drifted afield. He wondered if his cement had begun to harden yet. He was afraid that it would if he had much longer to wait before going to work. But when he looked again, the millionaire was pulling the cord that swept the cloth aside and revealed the statue.

Jim O'Neil's part in the ceremony was to seal the statue to its place. There was about its base a groove that was to be filled out, making it flush with the oval base. That groove, his trowel and the cement, were the only things that directly concerned him. There was nothing else. The elation engendered by art, he did not know. Yet the statue held his attention.

And the statue merited the wrapt attention that he gave it. Gay and vivid and fresh as an ocean-blown breeze was this girl-figure that lightly knelt upon the sloping marble turf. Life flowed from it; head tilted with the alert grace of the wood sprite; all tense, wild, vital, wind-blown; breathing of that convincing joy of youth. Pure it was as the marble from which it was created, and Jim O'Neil knew it to be very, very beautiful. He knew it even as he knew that in form, in spirit, in the very mute appeal of presence, the statue was Cassy.

"There is a certain lingering sweetness about it—"

Cassy's father desired greatly to hear what the millionaire had to say, but there was something else that he desired more. And it was this something that drew him away into the millionare's garden, and beyond.

It was through Clara Boone that he found Cassy. It was the sculptress who had taken her in and it was she who led Jim O'Neil to Cassy's room and opened the door for him to pass inside.

"Say, Kid, I guess we didn't understand each other very well," said Jim O'Neil as he pushed back his plate that evening.

It was Saturday night and the supper was through, yet he remained at the table puffing at his pipe and sending white rivulets coursing and expanding toward the ceiling.

Cassy sniffed comfortably at a film of smoke that had ebbed over toward her.

"Say Dad," she asked, "when two people know all about each other—and haven't any secrets between them—and are good friends—and never believe the things they hear about each other, except the good things—and—well, what do you call 'em, Dad?"

"Pals," Jim O'Neil replied promptly. "There's only one word to describe them, and that's 'pals'!" And then he leaned over the table and spoke into Cassy's eyes. "Say, Kid, that's what we two will be—pals."

# The Trap of Circumstance

BY E. ROBERT STEVENSON

*Fearing that he is losing his reason, a man forces a burglar who has broken into his house to be a party to his death to escape the family shame of a suicide's death.*

A THICK night fog soaked into the town, so heavy that fences, porch floors, flagstone walks and other exposed things sopped in all the moisture they could bear and then reeked in its clammy dampness. From the foliage of trees and bushes and the eaves of houses, where the watery mist had thickened into drops, every now and then it dripped heavily.

In the shadow of a great elm, before a residence that set back among the dreary shadows of such chill dripping trees, stood a man—waiting. As though the fog and night darkness did not offer enough concealment, he hugged close to the tree trunk, embracing to the full the shadows that absorbed the outlines of his sturdy form.

For over two hours he had been lurking thus about the house, clinging to the shadows of a tree for a while on one side and then on another. Now and again, as a shiver shook him, he would let slip an oath, in a disgusted mutter repeating, "God! It's a rotten night!"

From a steeple afar, came the strokes of the midnight hour. Another shiver quivered through him.

"I ain't going to wait here much longer," he gave expression to his thought and, bending, picked up a small black leather bag that had been resting at his feet.

Again he shivered.

"Here goes," he muttered, as if giving himself the command for action. Before leaving the sheltering shadow, however, he paused for a moment to look carefully about him on all sides. Then, as one who would take the place by determined, rapid assault, he turned his steps directly across the lawn to the side of the house. Over the iron railing of a first floor balcony he climbed and dropped his bag on the flooring. Evidently his every action had been carefully planned during those hours of vigil.

Again, for a moment, he turned toward the street, stood still and listened. Then, satisfied that no one was there, he deftly opened the leather bag and took from it a softened mass of putty. He warmed and worked this for a moment in his hands. His nimble fingers then laid it in a soft paste over one of the small lights of glass in the French window before him.

The bag next yielded a small wooden mallet; a quick decisive blow broke the pane and he removed it. One or two small pieces of glass fell but carried with them putty that deadened their jingle.

With quick, sensitive fingers, he

reached in and shoved back the bolt that held the window frame. Gently he pushed, but it would not yield.

"Damn it!" he exclaimed softly in nervous irritation. A second bolt held it at the bottom.

Again he turned to the bag for implements of siege. As he bent, however, his attention was attracted to a second French window on the balcony. He gave a startled jump. It stood conveniently open, pulled in at least half a foot.

"Looks leery," he soliloquized in low tones. "Too damned convenient."

For a moment he stood, in the grip of indecision. Then suspicion was thrown aside. He decided that "some fool servant had forgotten to close it." Again his movements were in perfect control—determined. The bag was shoved into a corner, the window pushed wide open and he entered.

The pocket light that he flashed rapidly in two or three directions showed the dining room. It located the table, buffet, china cabinet, but they received no more than a fleeting glance. Thus flashing the lamp, he made his way into the hall, found there a wide staircase and followed its gracefully curving black walnut colonial railing up to the second floor.

Another flash showed a wide old-fashioned hall with rooms on either side. All doors were closed save one, and that received his first attention. It was an unoccupied bedroom that gave up to his rapid search nothing worth the taking.

On an instant, from somewhere across the hall, came a sharp noise as though someone had dropped something. The intruder's sensitive ears caught the sound in a painful throb and his whole body responded with a nervous leap.

He stood motionless, intently listening. Not another sound. Five minutes of silence. With catlike tread he moved into the hall. There again he stood listening, every nerve tense. All was quiet.

Across to the closed door opposite he crept stealthily. Before it he bent, holding his ear close to the crack.

Of a sudden, without warning, the door jerked open and a flood of light from the room fell full across him. Like a wild creature suddenly startled, he leaped back, whipped from his pocket an automatic pistol and covered the doorway before waiting to discover whether it was man, woman, or child, that had thus come upon him.

"If yer move or speak, I'll shoot yer heart out," he growled.

Before him was a man of middle age with gray hair, sunken eyes and pale, haggard face. Startled, he seemed in turn, but hardly frightened. He appeared to have understood the threat, but, instead of standing still, he made a feint as though to get the weapon.

"I said stand still," came the order again in a deeper growl.

The answer was simply another clutch toward the arm that held the revolver—a clutch that was easily warded off by a quick jerk and turn of the body. Then, in what under the circumstances was a mad action, the threatened one seized the armed man's left wrist and began pulling him weakly about the hall.

Nothing could have been easier

than for the holder of the pistol to have killed his assailant, yet the weapon was not used. A moment of thus tempting Providence and the gray-haired man let go his hold and dropped back into the doorway.

"You're a poor burglar," he said calmly, a shade of irritated disappointment in his voice. "What have you got a gun for?"

"I ain't anxious to show you," was the answer, "but if you yelp a sound, I'll let you in on more than one way of using this shooter!"

As he spoke, he reversed the weapon in his hand and indicated that the offender's skull would be knocked with the butt.

"Isn't it loaded?" came the calm query.

"I may as well tell you it ain't. Maybe you'd known by this time if it was. But if you yelp a sound—" the threat began again.

"Don't worry," he was interrupted. "I'm the only one in the house. Come in."

The door was pushed open wide in invitation.

"Do you think you can soothe me into a nap?" the intruder asked suspiciously.

"Not exactly, but I can't make any more noise in here than I can out there."

Perhaps some idea that the old fellow was "off his head" and that it might be best to humor him came to the suspicious one's mind. At any rate, he stepped through the doorway.

It was a comfortable study, lined with bookcases; a desk-table at its center; but all in a state of marked disorder. A student's lamp had been thrown from the desk, its globe smashed into pieces. A waste-paper basket had been overturned, stepped upon and broken. Books and papers were scattered everywhere about the floor. A chair was overturned. At the far end of the room stood a small safe, its door open, its contents pulled out in a disorderly heap before it.

"Another crook job," flashed into the burglar's mind as his fleeting glance took in this disorder. He turned sharply to get his companion's face in the full light.

The other, reading his thoughts, shook his head and smiled in a wan and sickly manner. The character of that face impressed the inquisitor. The crook idea was instantly thrown aside.

The host pointed to a chair, but the visitor shook his head.

"I stands here," he said, leaning against the wall next the door. "I might want to make a quick getaway!"

The host sat on the edge of the desk.

"You probably think me crazy," he volunteered.

"Well, you ain't acting exactly normal," was the reply. "When a burglar threatens to shoot, the approved style for the person in the line of his gun is to follow orders. You don't appear to give a damn."

"You're right. I don't. I was about to commit suicide."

The burglar whistled, a light of understanding breaking over his face.

"Family troubles or money?"

"Worse. Insanity. My head is going off. I'm headed for an old family rut. My father and grand-

father died in insane retreats. I'm not going to."

"How are you going to do it?"

"See here."

Turning, he picked up five little pieces of wood and began fitting them together on the desk. In a moment he had framed one of those falls or traps such as youngsters use to catch field rodents.

"I place the revolver in this crotch," he explained, "and rest this stick against the trigger. These four books, laid with apparent carelessness on the desk, spring the trap. See! This one I lift, it starts the others; that one falls upon the trigger stick. I've tried a blank already, so I know how it will work. The jar of the explosion scatters the sticks, and the gun falls among the books on the desk. I drop way over here somewheres."

"That's a left-handed way of doing a job," was the suspicious comment. "Why bother with the sticks?"

"Pride and necessity. I have a sister that I care for. I don't want her to be obliged to face the world with a suicide disgrace in the family. Then, too, my insurance policy carries a suicide clause that would cut off its payment to her. It hasn't been an easy job. I've messed up the room to make it look like the marks of a struggle. I've opened the window downstairs so as to provide an explanation of how my supposed assailant got in and out. My big worry, however, has been that the sticks might not scatter just right. A little hitch might set the coroner guessing his way to the truth."

For a moment the host stopped. "Look here!" he said, struck by a new idea.

Opening a drawer, he took from it a packet of bills.

"I've a proposition to make you," he said. "There's a thousand. It's yours if you'll wait until I've shot myself and then carry off the pistol."

The burglar jumped into activity.

"Not much," he objected. "Somebody'll hear that shot, jump in and get me. Then what? There wouldn't be a jury this side of hell that could be made to believe the suicide story I'd stand ready to tell 'em. Good night!"

That final was a bromide rather than a salutation, but as he uttered it he started toward the door.

"Stand!" came the sharp command. And he stood, for the loaded pistol had been removed from the trap and was now leveled at his head.

"It's absolutely safe for you," his insistent host went on. "I've fixed a night when all my servants are away. I'm a bachelor. We two have the house entirely to ourselves."

"It's too big a risk, I tell you," the detained man protested.

"How long will they give you if I hand you over to the police?"

The expression of the man at the door showed plainly that that struck him as a nasty idea.

"Ten years, maybe," he answered. "I've been up before."

"Well, if you don't accept my proposition, I'll walk you down to the telephone and call for the police."

For a moment they stood staring at each other. The burglar decided that the man at the other side of that gun meant business.

"It's a rotten risk," he repeated.

"It's a risk of your business," was

the answer. "You've got to take the risks. You climbed into this box uninvited and now you'll get out only on my terms."

"How do you know I'll keep my word?"

"Because you'll gain nothing by breaking it. Once I've shot, you're in the trap, that is, if you are caught in this room or leaving the house; it doesn't matter much whether you have left the revolver or are carrying it away."

"Do you mean to tell me that I've got to stand here and watch you blow your brains out?"

"Why not?"

"Why not? A good big lot of why nots! I ain't setting myself up on Sunday-school morals. This ain't my first crook job. But you'd better believe I ain't so cold-blooded that I can stand and watch a job like that done without a quiver. You didn't catch me with an empty gun because I was careless. I've never carried it loaded. I'm no man killer. Let me out of here!"

Again he turned toward the door, but his host checked his departure at the pistol point.

"Move away from that door," he ordered.

The trapped man followed the direction indicated by the automatic, moving along the wall until he came to the lighted gas fixture.

"Stand there, now," came the order.

An idea flashed to the burglar and with lightning speed he followed its impulse. His fingers gripped the gas cock and turned it. Sudden darkness fell upon the room. Under its cover, he leaped for the man with the pistol. The automatic barked twice and its holder plunged forward. Their bodies met in a sudden jolt that hurled the pistol across the room.

The burglar recovered his feet. In the darkness he stood still, intently listening. Below a clock chimed one, but otherwise the house was dead still. He felt his way to the door. He gave an ear to the hall. There was no outcry; no disturbance had been made by the shots.

Down the stairs he felt his way in the darkness and on into the dining room. His fingers felt for and found the catch of the French window. He opened it.

Crash! Upon him leaped a man, followed by a second, the two bearing him to the floor under the weight of their united rush. A chair fell. A foot crashed through a window. Muffled oaths arose as the three scuffled about the carpet. Then came the clink of manacles. His wrists were locked.

"Flash your light, Bill!" one directed.

The glare of light showed blue uniforms and brass buttons.

"Get up, now."

The burglar obeyed. The third cuff of the manacles was locked to a policeman's wrist.

"We've had an eye on you over an hour laying out for this job," he was gruffly informed.

"Bring him in till we see what those shots were," directed the officer with the flash light.

Resistance was useless. He followed quietly as the way was lighted up the stairs.

At the door of the room that he had

just left they stopped while the finger of light darted about. It fell upon a gray-haired man, on his knees, clinging to the arm of a heavy leather chair. The holder of the light crossed over to him.

"Strike a light," he ordered his comrade. "This looks like a bad job."

A match glowed, touched the gas jet and once again flooded the room with light. Labored breathing came from the kneeling man. The officer put his arm about him and lifted him into the chair. A dark streak of red stained his white shirt front.

"Looks like it got him hard," the officer who was bending over him remarked. "It's too bad we waited so long. Get the gun."

The burglar's pockets were rapidly felt over and the automatic produced.

"Easy!" The discoverer had the triumphant tone of having "got the goods."

The manacled one simply stared in hopeless depression at the dying man. His captor jerked the manacles to stir him to attention.

"We've got you red-handed this trip. You may as well spit the truth," he advised. "You can't raise the face to lie about this job."

In the chair the dying man struggled. By a painful effort he pulled himself slightly forward.

"Wait!"

A hollow rattle was in his voice and for a moment he could bring no more to his lips. An ashen gray pallor overspread his face.

"I—must—tell—"

A pause fell between each word.

"Never mind, we know," the officer who was bracing his weakening body assured him in a gruff but kindly way. "He bored you," indicating the prisoner.

W e a k l y but emphatically the wounded man shook his head.

"What?" Incredulous surprise was in the question.

Again the head shook in denial.

The dying man's finger pointed to the burglar as he struggled once more in speech.

"He—threatened—I gripped him—we struggled—"

He stopped, for the moment unable to go on. The three listeners hung upon his every word.

"His—gun—wasn't loaded—"

The words weakened into a whisper.

"Another one—on the roof—leaned i n window—s h o t—m e t w i c e—dropped pistol on floor there."

Spent by his great effort, the dying man fell back into the chair and closed his eyes. For a moment no one moved or spoke. Then the officer beside the chair bent his head against his chest.

"Done for," he announced curtly.

A jerk of the manacles dragged the burglar's attention away from the prostrate form.

"Who was your pal?" his captor growled in the threatening tones of the third degree. "You'd better steer us after him and give up the whole truth on this job."

The burglar recovered his calm self-assurance.

"T r u th—hell," h e answered. "You've found out all you're going to know about this job. The pal who helped me is where you'll never get your fingers on him."

# Getting Lefty

BY WARD TRAIL

*Trailed to Africa by a New York detective, a diamond thief, with the aid of Nature, foils justice.*

THE tramp steamer, Adrienne, was two days out of Bremen before Mason was sure his quarry was not aboard. It was too much. Twenty weeks before he had been told tersely enough to "Get Lefty," and had been given Lefty's description.

Mason was the star detective on the New York force and he had not considered it altogether complimentary when he was sent out to pick up a diamond thief, short and stocky, with red hair, a fleck of brown in one blue eye and a purple crescent scar above the other, a deep dimple in the left cheek and plenteous freckles on both, besides being left handed. Usually he was put on cases where there was little to work upon, and he had always brought in his man. Mason had not understood—then.

And now for twenty weeks had been following this colored Sunday supplement across and up and down the continent of Europe, always close behind him, but always behind. He had been within an hour of his man two days before, when he had boarded the Adrienne. There had been almost a blazed trail to the tramp, and now, two days out, he was convinced that the man had once more eluded him. The steamer was without wireless apparatus and the first port touched would be Waco, South Africa, where freight for the diamond mines would be left. He had practically shanghaied himself, and Lefty would have just seven weeks start.

Diamond mines? Lefty never by any chance appropriated anything but diamonds—j u s t diamonds—nothing else. He had time and time again left other precious stones and gold untouched. And the trail to the steamer for South Africa had been very plain indeed.

The slow days passed and the boat glided over the oily waters of the tropics, crossed the line and plowed her way into the blue wastes beyond with never a stop to break the dull tedium. But Mason no longer desired to stop off. He had conceived an idea so far from the probabilities that he thought it might be quite possible.

At last the days of slow pacing the cramped decks came to an end and the Adrienne nosed into Waco. Mason began his careful inquiries at once, and to his vast delight, as much as to his amazement, found that his error lay simply in taking the wrong boat and not in chasing his man to that particular dock. He was told that a short stout man with red hair and freckles, a funny cock in one eye, and a curved, purple scar over the other, had come in a week

ago on a faster tramp and gone on immediately to the largest mine in the diamond fields. Quietly, therefore, Mason slipped into the dirty passenger compartment of the little jerk water line and followed. At the mine, his credentials gave him the privilege of nosing around to his heart's content. He made no more inquiries. He wanted to take this glaring white elephant without further assistance.

Having looked over the outside works, he made his way into the mine with the men. Man after man passed but not one was his man. It was possible that Lefty was with the other shift, so Mason decided to bide his time. He would debark from Waco with Lefty in his custody, or wire his resignation to his chief from Waco. And he would turn the trick by himself, too.

There was a smothered detonation. No, he would not go back now to where he had watched the men placing the fuse for a blast. Tonight, when he looked over the other shift, perhaps—

"Quick sand! quick sand! The shelf! The shelf!"

The gutteral cry was quite meaningless to Mason's ears as he made his way thoughtfully to the mouth of the mine. Hurried footsteps sounded behind him and men raced past him, wild eyes glaring in their blackened faces. Then the cry came again.

"Quick sand! Quick sand! The shelf! The shelf!"

Two burly men grasped Mason's arms and raced him with them to the last break. One of them lifted him bodily and threw him up on the wide ledge there, on which the others had already scrambled.

"Help me!" cried the man who had waited to lift the visitor.

Four men reached out eager arms and with a mighty heave brought him up with them. And then Mason saw and understood. Quick sand, released by the last blast, was flooding the mine! It had overtaken the man and though he had been pulled up in time, his boots were left sticking in the innocent-looking, wet sand, now showing in the dim light on the floor below the ledge where they crouched. Even as he looked, the boots were lost to view, though the sand hardly seemed to move.

"What's to be done?" he asked.

The man next him shrugged his shoulders.

"Wait," was the laconic reply.

The deadly sand crept up, and up and up. It passed a crack that Mason had been watching.

"Wait for what?" he suddenly shouted, shuddering in a new and deadly fear.

"For planks, if they know about it in time," vouchsafed another of the men in a stolidly indifferent tone.

Mason watched the slowly rising sand with fascinated terror. Now it passed the next jagged crack. A gray, sleek something touched his hand and vanished into the gloom. The slight, scratching sounds he had been hearing ever since the noise of the blast had subsided were explained. The rats, of course. The still sand made no sound. It only rose and rose and rose and rose. It was up to the place where the ledge rounded out now. A man pulled up his feet.

Suddenly, Mason gave a mighty yell. Then, having found his voice, continued to use it without consciousness of what he said, or seeming volition on his part. The men looked at him pityingly. One of them reached over and patted his shoulder.

"Do something! Do something!" he yelled at them.

"We're waiting. They most always know in time and send in planks," one of them assured him.

And then it happened. Quietly a broad plank nosed its way into the dim opening by the ledge. Then up to the end of that plank came the end of another like it and a man's cheerful voice sang out into the deadly gloom, "All aboard for the outside of this, my hearties!"

Something in the timbre of that voice roused Mason from the limp relief into which the appearance of the plank had cast him. It was quite unlike the voices of the men around him. It was really very like a New York Irish voice. He peered keenly at the man. And it was true! He had red hair and freckles, a dark scar above one eye and a deep dimple in one cheek. In the darkness, it was impossible to see the fleck of brown in one eye, but Mason was willing to take that for granted, since the man was short and stocky and used his left hand with more dexterity than his right in guiding the broad planks over the treacherous sand. It was Lefty.

And then Lefty looked at Mason, and Mason suddenly knew something he had merely suspected before. Lefty knew him and his mission! And now Lefty held his life, as well as the lives of the seven stolid fellows beside him, in the hollow of his hand!

"It's on the outside you'd rather be seeing me now, is it not so, just, Mr. Mason?" he asked in a mocking voice, and as he made a mocking bow to the great detective whom he had led all over the continent, his left hand made a sudden awkward movement and the plank tipped on edge. Slowly, though the stocky man clutched it with all his might, it slipped, slipped down, slowly down, down. It was gone!

One of the men swore softly in his mother tongue. Lefty backed carefully off the plank on which he was lying to the one behind it, and slowly and with infinite care, pushed the front one up to the ledge. Mason understood. Sign language makes plain reading to a detective. And with that understanding, his courage came back with a rush. He was again the calm, cool Mason, holding his life as nothing, his profession as everything—the Mason that had started on this quest.

When the plank was close enough, the men, with stolid and unanimous politeness, motioned the detective forward. This also, Mason understood. In a way, he was their guest; they would give him their best. But he could not have it so. This was his fight. Lefty did not mean to be taken and he could easily tip a plank in the darker passage through which they must creep like snakes, feeling their way, lost if a plank were lost.

"Seven men are to come ahead of me—seven—count them," he said, quietly, as Lefty slipped away. There was no reply.

"I do not know how to go. You

must go first that I may learn," he said to the men.

"But she is creeping up," they reminded him.

"Plenty of time, if you will go quickly and show me the way," he managed to say, though he felt his terror returning.

It was true, as the man had said. "She" was creeping up. "She" had not paused with the advent of help. Already the lower half of the bulge at the very edge of the ledge was covered with the simple-looking, wet sand, that did not seem to be moving, yet moved.

With consummate carefulness, one of the men crept out on the plank. Not until he gave a shout, indicating that he had reached the third plank, did the second man start. The sand had crept an inch nearer before his shout started the third man. How slow that third man seemed! The sand had risen another inch before the fourth man received his signal. Slowly, slowly it rose and rose and rose. A shout, and the fifth man crept serpent-wise onto the plank, that seemingly immovable, moved and rose, and moved and rose, with the sand on which it lay. Another inch of precious space was lost before the shout that tolled off the sixth man.

Then the seventh man tried to make Mason take his chance.

"No. You must go. This is new to me and I've lost my nerve. If your life depended on my not tipping a plank, I'd be dead sure to tip one; and if I did that, my man, I'd just slip off, and we'd both be lost, and so uselessly. No. You go and if I know I'm last, you see I won't have to bother about the plank I creep off, and that'll make it a lot easier for me."

The man protested a little, but when the shout came, he went, like the very sensible fellow that he was. And Mason was left there alone.

Slowly, slowly, the sand crept up and up. An inch was lost—an inch and a half—was the sand rising faster now or was the seventh man going more slowly? Mason could not tell. After an eternity, the shout came. The sand was rising faster! After the shout and before he could creep onto the plank another inch was lost. It was, indeed, rising very much faster. There was a scant two inches of the ledge left when he finally got himself properly spread upon the first plank and began the sinuous glide to the next. Which one would be displaced? Would Lefty start back to meet him after the seventh man emerged, and manage in that dim passage to tip one plank? He reached the third plank and something told him to shout as if there were still a man to follow. He shouted. The seventh man heard and called back encouragingly to him. He did not catch what the fellow said. It did not matter.

Where would the missing plank be? It was hard work, this crawling, and if he were not to get out, he hoped he would slip very soon into the smothering monster that was lifting him and his plank higher and higher and higher all the time, though now there was nothing by which he could mark its progress. He crept onto the sixth plank. How many there were he had no idea. He was very tired,

but he would wriggle on. Maybe somebody would prevent Lefty from tipping a plank. But who was there to know that Lefty would have any object in his death? Fool that he had been, not to tell the manager what he was there for. He would take his man alone! That old spurt of pride seemed very puerile to Mason now. Twelve planks—thirteen—fourteen. He was counting automatically. It did not matter how many there were. He had had no idea that it would be so far or take such centuries. Was life, after all, worth it? If he got out alive, Lefty would be gone. He most certainly would never sit down out there and wait for a detective to come out and take him. But, at least, if he did not get him, he would have spiked his guns for any design he might have on diamonds in the rough. There was little satisfaction in that. Sixteen—seventeen—eighteen—it was growing lighter. Was it? Or was he losing his head? Nineteen—twenty—No, it was really lighter. He was almost out. Voices came faintly to him. Would it be the next plank that was missing? No. His hand clutched it and he drew himself on. Twenty-one—twenty-two— It was very light now, and the voices were nearer, but he did not care. They had no meaning for him. He was too busy feeling for the end of the plank—that end which would not be kissing the other— Twenty-three—twenty-four—something lifted him. He was no longer creeping forward with tired, swollen hands and knees that were numbed. It was quite all right, of course. He had rather expected to go down when he came to the place of the missing plank, but it seemed he was to go up instead. That did not matter, either. He was floating easily, and ease was what he wanted.

He floated in a downy, soft darkness for ages and ages, then a gutteral voice commanded, "Here, trink dis," and something that burned was forced down his throat. He sat up. The smudged miners were swimming rather foolishly, he thought, about him. Dizzily he saw that it was a kindly Dutch doctor who held the cup to his lips. He drank again and the miners steadied themselves decorously.

"Where did my man go?" he asked weakly.

"Vot man iss dot?" the doctor wanted to know.

"A short, stocky, red-headed man, with a fleck of brown in one blue eye and a purple, crescent scar above the other, a deep dimple in one cheek and freckles on both—a left-handed man," parroted Mason, glibly.

"So? Dot's dot man, for the life, dot de manager vants just now. It iss dot he iss stole all de rough diamonts vot vos packed ready for der shibment, ninety tousant tollars vort diamonts, unt mate off mit dem on dot dramp steamer dot sailed vile ve vos vatching at der mund for der men to ged oud of dot floot. Dot dramp she carries no vireless, too, unt schtops most eferyvere from now oud."

The good doctor was in a communicative mood and would have told his patient all he knew about the great diamond robbery, but at the moment, Mason inconsiderately fainted again and gave him something else to do.

# Jack in the Box

BY WILLARD E. HAWKINS

The Mystery of the Haunted Flat.

*Did you ever fear being buried alive? Read the sensations—in an up to date flat.*

JACK Willoughby and his wife had sensibly decided to do condensed housekeeping, until they could own their own home. They began looking for five room flats, perceived the extravagance of a spare sleeping room, and turned their search resolutely toward four room living quarters. Then the agent showed them a perfectly delightful three room apartment, and Jack snapped it up for fear their next visit would condemn him to life in one room and an annex.

It was a comfortable place. They had a pleasant living room, with a disappearing bed—one of those affairs that can be shoved out of sight under a closet during the day, so that you'd never know but what its headboard was the lower section of a real buffet. There was a tiny front porch, a kitchenette with a table arrangement, which you could fold up when you wanted to step out of the back door, a den, and a little tiled bath.

When they were alone, the Willoughby's ate from the folding table in the kitchen. If company came, they put the reading lamp on the piano and laid the cloth on the library table. And the disappearing bed made it unnecessary to invest in that article of furniture.

The agent who rented the apartment neglected to tell Willoughby that the flat was haunted. Perhaps he didn't know it. It had never entered Willoughby's head to inquire. From the earliest days there have been haunted castles and haunted houses; but whoever heard of a haunted flat?

For three months life had been going on very pleasantly with the Willoughbys. On the particular night to which this mass of predigested detail has been leading up, Willoughby retired as usual and slept his usual deep slumber. He was awakened by the doorbell, and has a faint recollection of kicking his wife out of bed to answer it.

He heard her moving around, falling over chairs and slipping into a kimona, then, having relieved his mind of responsibility, he dozed off again.

When next he woke up, the room was in pitch darkness. Turning his head from side to side, he tried to pierce the gloom to get his bearings. Willoughby's system was to look for the window over the piano on the east wall. From that he could figure out the general lay of the room, ending up with getting himself located head uppermost in bed.

To his surprise, he could not discover the window, though he turned his head from side to side. There was not even a ray of reflected light

to assist him.

Willoughby was a cool fellow, not easily disturbed. He knew that it was all right, and that when he became fully awake he would find himself twisted around staring at a blank wall or something of the sort. It wasn't until he tried to rise on one elbow that he became at all alarmed.

He was unable to move!

It was a fact. Except for a limited freedom which allowed him to turn his head from side to side, he was as utterly helpless as a stone image. He commenced to struggle frantically; but his efforts served only to make matters worse by convincing him that he was in a horrible pickle.

His first explanation was paralysis. Then he found he could wiggle his toes, cramp and uncramp his leg muscles, open and close his hands, and go through other restricted motions.

But when he attempted to rise, the weight of a hundred tons seemed to press him down. The fact was, he was lying in quarters so cramped that there was no room for his muscles to contract.

He thrust out one free hand exploringly and came into immediate proximity with the side wall of his prison. He lifted his head and his forehead struck against a hard surface with stunning violence.

Even in his panic-stricken condition, he abandoned the surmise that the ceiling had fallen. But how on earth did he get into this close box? Then it came to him.

He had awakened in his own coffin!

It is no reflection upon Willoughby's courage to say that he was terrified. Of all terrors dreaded by men, the most awful is that of being buried alive.

He gave a sharp cry of anguish, but checked it upon the instant. The horror was magnified by the reverberating din that followed his vocal demonstration. After that, no matter to what lengths his terror threatened to carry him, he was careful to make no outcry.

Was he lying buried now, or had he only recently been placed in the coffin? He thought of the brave little woman who would be left alone in the world and was filled with regret at little thoughtless acts he had allowed himself to commit toward her. Then the consideration that he might not yet be underground brought with it hope.

If he could attract attention before being loaded in the hearse and taken to the cemetery, there was a possibility that he might be saved.

Heretofore he had not been aware of any sounds outside his coffin. Now he listened intently and was rewarded. Yes, deeply muffled, but perceptible, there came to his ears the sound of a thud. His senses translated it into the banging of a door a long distance away. Evidently he had not been taken away in the hearse.

As if in answer to his thought, there came a gentle heaving of the box. It was followed by a sound—or sensation—that could not be mistaken, the vibration of wheels against the hard pavement. It was the death-knell of hope. It meant that he was in the hearse and starting for the cemetery.

Little wonder that he fainted away.

No; Willoughby was not disinterred by providential body snatchers. His experience was even stranger.

He awakened not to sit erect in his coffin, to view his grim companions in the medical dissecting room, but to find the sun streaming in on him through the window over the piano. He was lying in his own little flat, in his own little bed, and his own little wife was unconcernedly beating up muffins in the tiny kitchenette.

Dreamed it all! Perhaps. But Willoughby could not convince himself that the experience was a figment of nightmare. He felt as exhausted mentally as if he had actually gone through the nerve racking experience. Besides, the dream explanation could not account for the slight discoloration which he saw—or fancied—when he examined himself in the looking glass. The discoloration appeared at just the point of his forehead that had come in violent contact with the lid of the coffin.

Because he felt that it might frighten her, Willoughby did not mention the experience to his wife.

By the following day, he had regained his composure and except for a small lurking doubt, that refused to be entirely silenced, had accepted the only rational explanation—that it was a nightmare.

Until the latter part of the week nothing happened to bring this lurking doubt into the forefront. Willoughby was a sound sleeper, and his rest remained undisturbed until one night when he became conscious of the same vibration of wheels that had ended his former memory. Before he became fully awake, the vibration stopped abruptly.

His attempt to move met with the same uncanny result as before. The cold perspiration came out all over his body with the gruesome knowledge of his situation. But his fear of being buried alive was not, at first, as great as on the former occasion. He had a half conviction that he would wake up in the morning and find it all an unreality, just as on the former occasion.

But an even greater apprehension, the fear of the supernatural, took the place of this terror. Then it came to him suddenly that this was the same experience, the true reality. There had been no real interruption; the supposed awakening and going about his daily affairs was a dream he had gone through as he lay in his coffin.

The more he considered this, the more reasonable it seemed. He had lost consciousness when the hearse commenced to bear him toward the cemetery. He had awakened just as the vehicle drew up at its destination. After all, he was to be buried alive.

Oh, for the welcome of another dream! He closed his eyes, forcing himself to lie motionless and calm. Presently a not unpleasant stupor—perhaps due to the close atmosphere—stole over him, bringing the slumber for which he had scarcely dared to hope.

And Willoughby awoke in the morning to find things just as usual in the tiny flat. To say that he was bewildered would be putting it mildly.

"Doc," he said, later in the same day, "I—I wish you'd look me over. There's something wrong—with my mind—I believe. I have hallucina-

tions—dreadful hallucinations."

The physician regarded him gravely. "What sort of hallucinations?"

"Of—of being buried alive."

After ten minutes of thumping and questioning, the advisor wrote him out a prescription.

"Doc," said Willoughby, "are these pills for indigestion?"

"Why—er—to an extent their properties will assist your stomach in performing its work."

"Thank you," said Willoughby. When he regained the street, he tore the prescription to fragments and walked home thoughtfully. He had a plan of his own to settle all doubts of the reality of his strange experience. The device was simple. It consisted in tying a string around one of his fingers just before he went to bed.

He did not expect to make his test that night, but nevertheless the opportunity came. He woke up in pitch darkness with the same feeling of constriction as before. The tight coffin held him firmly entrapped.

He recalled the piece of string. He would settle all doubts as to the reality of his other life—the life in which he appeared to be free. With thumb and little finger he felt carefully of the middle digit.

The string, just as he had tied it, was there.

Now to prove to his daylight self that the coffin experience was likewise real.

He untied the string by a dexterous manipulation of the fingers of the same hand, then settled down with calm resignation to await the release which would come only with sleep.

The next morning, the finger that had worn the string was bare. For the first time, Jack Willoughby regarded his wife with the eye of suspicion. He did not know what he suspected her of doing, but the fact remained that she had been alone with him during the hours when his other life held sway.

"Marie," he demanded, "did anything out of the ordinary occur in our flat last night?"

"Decidedly not," she replied somewhat tartly. "The usual interruption. Mrs. Mack woke me up in order to call the doctor over our telephone. I'm sorry her husband is ill, but I do wish they'd install an instrument of their own. Three nights, almost hand running, are too many."

Jack stared in perplexity. "Did she—come night before last, too?" he inquired.

"Yes, and talked interminably about people who lived in our flat before we came. The man died, and they buried him from our front room. He was subject to trances and twice narrowly escaped being buried alive. And, she declares, the place is haunted. Superstitious old thing!"

Willoughby rose. His cheeks were blanched.

"Oh, Jack!" exclaimed his wife in alarm. "Oh, you look ghastly!"

"It's—nothing," he reassured her. "I—I don't feel well. I'll see the doctor today." He made his escape.

So this was the meaning of the terrible hallucination. Willoughby could not doubt that physic influence was at work in the room, causing any sentive person who occupied it to experience the same terrible sensations

that had possessed another amid the same surroundings.

That night, he determined, should be his last in the flat, unless the ghastly experiences ceased. His hopes on this score were rudely dispelled when he awoke to find himself again in the fancied coffin. Yet the knowledge that the thing was a chimera—a mere projection upon his own consciousness of a mind long since dead, did not make it one whit easier to bear. He had learned by experience the one sure method of release. It consisted of lying perfectly still and allowing his mind to sink into dullness.

For a fourth time he sank into slumber and awakened as usual the next morning.

"Let's move!" he exclaimed wildly at the breakfast table. "Let's not stay another day in this flat."

His wife glanced at him wonderingly. "I was almost ready to propose it myself yesterday," she said, "but last night I told Mrs. Mack that we couldn't stand it to have our rest disturbed so much nights, and she promised to have a 'phone of her own installed. So I think everything will be all right now."

"H—m, yes. Has she been telephoning again?"

"Didn't you know? And she had on the most ridiculous looking—but of course—I forgot."

"Forgot what?"

"That you couldn't see what she wore, because you were out of sight. It is convenient to have a bed that rolls under cover; I merely have to push it back into the wall so that visitors won't get a view of you in dishabille. But she stays so long that I almost wonder you don't smother. You appear to sleep calmly through it all."

Willoughby was silent for several minutes. Presently he dropped his knife and fork, then strolled unobtrusively into the front room. He bent down and peered into the cavity beneath the clothes closet, into which the bed was rolled when not in use. He eyed the top and the sides of the chamber, noted how the former sloped up near the head to allow room for pillows, and he knelt to pick up a piece of string that lay just inside the opening.

His wife heard him walk slowly toward the street door.

"You aren't going to give up this lovely flat, are you, dear?" she called.

A long pause, then: "Not if you like it," he answered, and his voice was strangely subdued.

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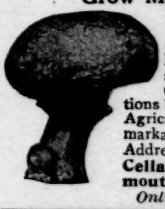

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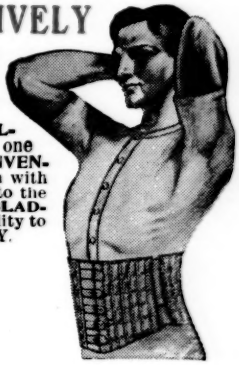

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